

America's Superspy

He's Colby of the CIA, the Unknown Cloak and Dagger Man Who Runs His Own 'Department of Dirty Tricks'



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A few weeks ago, a Norwegian who had served in the anti-Nazi underground saw a newspaper photograph and thought he recognized an American OSS officer he had worked with during the war and known only as "No. 96."

The photograph was that of William Egan Colby, 53, a career covert operator for the Central Intelligence Agency,

and chief of its supersecret Directorate of Operations, sometimes known as "the Department of Dirty Tricks." As part of the high-level game of musical chairs touched off by Watergate, President Nixon had just named Bill Colby to be head of the CIA.

Served in OSS

And there is an interesting fact about Colby in the files at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. His official CIA biography relates that he served in the

OSS during World War II and contains this sentence:

"Shortly before the end of the war in 1945, he led a team dropped in northern Norway to destroy a rail line used for transporting German reinforcements."

The Norwegian man who read about Colby's appointment and thought he recognized his picture got in touch with an American woman who lives in Kensington, Md., and who is a close friend of the Colbys, particularly of Colby's wife, Barbara. Could the

woman find out whether Colby was his old comrade in arms, No. 96?

"I tried to find out," the woman in Kensington told me. "And I'm still trying. Bill wouldn't say, and Barbara doesn't know, or at least she says she doesn't know."

The story illustrates something about Colby that should not be entirely surprising in a man who has spent most of his adult life as — well — a spy.

A State Department official who had worked with Colby in Vietnam put it this way:

"He's soft-spoken, with a casual style. He has a forthright manner, but there's also a private Bill Colby. He's a very private person."

Indeed, there are really two Bill Colbys: given his covert background there would almost have to be.

There is William Egan Colby, the quiet, young "Foreign Service officer" in the American Embassy in Stockholm and Rome in the 1950s, who was simultaneously William Egan Colby of the CIA and up-and-coming "black" (that is, secret) operator

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working in the CIA's Clandestine Services under State Department cover.

Later, there was Bill Colby in Saigon in 1959, listed in the official Biographic Register of the Department of State as a "political officer," and later as "first secretary" of the embassy. In fact, he became Saigon station chief for "the Agency" during this period.

Then, in 1962, he turned up at Langley as chief of the Far East Division of CIA's covert side.

'Pacification' Work

There was Bill Colby back in Vietnam again in 1968, heading the "pacification" program, building roads and schools and performing good works. There was also Bill Colby who supervised the Phoenix program, designed to "neutralize" the Viet Cong, which its critics have charged was a program of systematic assassination, murder and torture — an accusation that Colby has vigorously denied, under oath.

According to figures Colby provided to a House subcommittee in 1971, however, the Phoenix program killed 20,587 persons between 1968 and May, 1971. That's right: 20,587.

Now, there is Bill Colby in 1973, a devoted family man, a good husband and father of four children, A devout Roman Catholic who regularly attends mass at the Little Flower Roman Catholic Church in Bethesda, Md., and who lives in an unpretentious white-brick house in Springfield, Md., a Washington suburb that is not as many as, say, Chevy Chase.

Bill Colby? Why he was neighborhood chairman of the Boy Scouts.

"Bill's always been involved in the Boy Scouts," his wife said. "He was a Boy Scout in China when his father was assigned there as an Army officer."

It is a long way from the Boy Scouts to the CIA's Directorate of Operations, a euphemism that encompasses "dirty tricks," although perhaps there are some similarities, too, if one is to judge by the activities and style of E. Howard Hunt Jr., the most famous recent graduate (if he

did graduate) of the CIA's division.

As the agency's Deputy Director for Operations, Colby—when tapped by Nixon to be CIA chief—was the man directly in charge of America's global dirty tricks.

CIA is a bivalve; one half, the Directorate of Operations, collects information and engages in secret political operations. These are the spooks. The other half, the Directorate of Intelligence, staffed by scholarly types, analyzes what comes in.

It is the operations directorate, the cloak-and-dagger side where Colby has spent his entire CIA career, that on occasion overthrows governments, bankrolls foreign political parties and guerilla movements, has subsidized foundations in the United States, and, so it is rumored, has even engaged in the assassination of foreign political leaders.

It is covert political operations that have gotten CIA

into hot water over the years, from the Bay of Pigs to the "technical support" provided to the burglars of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. The Directorate of Operations is the foreign political-action and espionage arm of the United States Government.

Colby has chiefly dealt with Vietnam during the past 15 years, and as Deputy Director of Operations for only three months he can hardly be held accountable for everything that the Department of Dirty Tricks has been up to since 1947.

Things It Has Done

The CIA was created by Congress that year, and since then the operations directorate has, among other things:

—Air-dropped agents into Communist China in the early 1950s. Two CIA agents captured in 1952, Richard G. Fecteau and John T. Downey, have now been released; Downey was freed by Peking in March after more than 20 years in Chinese prisons.

—Overthrew the Government of Premier Mohammed Mossadegh of Iran in 1953, thereby keeping the Shah on his throne. Not accidentally, when Nixon replaced Richard

Helms as CIA chief in December, 1972, he sent him out as his Ambassador to Iran, one of the few countries in the world where a former CIA chief could comfortably serve as ambassador.

—Topped the Communist-dominated government of President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954.

—Attempted, unsuccessfully, to overthrow President Sukarno in Indonesia in 1958 with CIA pilots and B-26 bombers.

—Flown high-altitude U-2 spy planes over the Soviet Union to photograph strategic missiles, an operation that came to a crashing halt when CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers was shot down, alive, on May 1, 1960.

—Invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 with a brigade of Cuban exiles in a disastrous attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro.

—Set up a secret base at Camp Hale, 10,000 feet high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, where Tibetans were trained to return home and fight against Communist China.

—Advised and worked closely with the generals who staged a coup against President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam in 1963.

—Spent tens of thousands of dollars — some reports say millions — in Chile in 1964 to elect Eduardo Frei, the Christian Democrat candidate, over Marxist candidate Salvador Allende. Negotiated with ITT, and made some unsuccessful efforts, to prevent Allende from becoming President in 1970.

—Trained and supported a secret army in Laos of at least 30,000 men — a figure acknowledged by the CIA in *Continued on Page 6, Col. 2*

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August, 1971 — at a cost of more than \$300-million a year.

—Subsidized the National Student Association, the nation's largest student group, and many other business, labor, church, university and cultural organizations through dozens of willing foundation conduits — a scandal that erupted in 1967.

—Provided Watergate star E. Howard Hunt Jr. with his famous red wig, his miniature camera in a tobacco pouch, his false credentials and "a speech alteration device." The equipment was provided by the Technical Services Division of the CIA, and the CIA claims it had no idea that Hunt would use it to burglarize the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

This listing of accomplishments is necessarily incomplete, both for reasons of space and because the directorate's work is not always well-publicized.

The Director of Central In-

telligence, the post for which Nixon has nominated Colby, wears two hats. He is director of the CIA (at \$42,500 a year) but he is also chairman of the board and coordinator of all United States intelligence agencies, including the powerful Department of Defense Intelligence Agency, and the ultrasecret National Security Agency, which eavesdrops on world-wide communications and makes and breaks codes.

Senate's Task

The question of Colby's fitness is presumably the task of the United States Senate to consider since the post requires Senate confirmation.

Another question might be asked about whether Colby, who has figured at least peripherally in the Watergate investigations, is the proper man to head the CIA at a time when the CIA itself — and particularly its covert side — has been ensnared in various aspects of Watergate.

Perhaps the most trouble-

some, recurring problem in Bill Colby's long career, however, is the Phoenix program, which keeps rising to haunt him.

If there are two Bill Colbys, it is also true that they were two pacification programs in Vietnam. The very word "pacification," of course, has rather ominous, Orwellian overtones. It is part of the loathsome jargon of the Vietnam war — a war that did violence to the English language, as well as to human beings. Phoenix flapped into Colby's life through the window of "pacification."

The link to both programs was Robert W. Komer, a former CIA man (from the intelligence side) whom Lyndon Johnson sent to Vietnam in May, 1967, to head up the pacification effort. Komer is a Colby booster.

Phoenix had begun in its earlier stages as a CIA operation, and it was a joint United States-South Vietnamese program designed to identify and then "neutralize" the Viet

Cong "infrastructure." The enemy was "neutralized" by being killed, jailed or "rallied," a word that meant persuaded to defect.

During Colby's period with the pacification program, 28,978 persons were captured or jailed, 17,717 "rallied" and 20,587 killed, according to the figures Colby provided in 1971 to the House Foreign Operations and Government Information Subcommittee.

The following year, in testifying to the Moorhead subcommittee, Colby said that "the Phoenix program is not a program of assassination." The Viet Cong, he said, were killed as members of military units,

Another's Words

But one witness, K. Barton Osborn, a former military-intelligence agent, told the subcommittee that suspects caught by Phoenix were interrogated in airborne helicopters. Some prisoners, he said, were pushed out, to persuade

the more important suspects to talk. He said he had seen two prisoners killed by being thrown out the door.

Osborn also described other interrogations, which he said he had personally witnessed: "The use of the insertion of the 6-inch dowel into the . . . canal of one of my detainee's ears and the tapping through the brain until he died."

A central point of controversy over Phoenix is whether Viet Cong were killed during capture, as Colby has sworn, or during subsequent torture and interrogation. Robert Komer says that "90 percent of the Viet Cong infrastructure were killed in fire fights by the South Vietnamese military, in normal combat operations. Ten percent were killed by police and the PRU (Provincial Reconnaissance Units)." "Relatively few" under interrogation and a "very little" number by torture, he said.

While charges of torture in the Phoenix program remain unproved, a directive issued in May, 1970, to Phoenix per-

sonnel indicates that Phoenix was not for the squeamish.

The directive, signed by Maj. Gen. W. G. Golvin, emphasized the "desirability of obtaining these target individuals alive" and contained the peculiar phraseology that American personnel were "specifically unauthorized to engage in assassinations."

However, the directive said, "if an individual finds the police-type activities of the Phoenix program repugnant to him, on his application, he can be reassigned from the program"

Back to Washington

By mid-1971, Colby no longer had to deal with Phoenix matters in Vietnam. He came back to Washington, in part, friends say, to be with his seriously ill daughter, Catherine, who died last April at 23. Colby was named Executive Director of the CIA by Dick Helms early in 1972, and became head of the operations directorate a year later.

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