

Helms Says He Resisted Pressure by White House For C.I.A. Cover-Up Aid

8/3/73

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2—The former head of the Central Intelligence Agency told the Senate Watergate committee today that he had to resist White House pressures in order to keep the agency clean of involvement in the Watergate cover-up.

Richard Helms, the former Director of Central Intelligence

Excerpts from the testimony will be found on Page 11.

who is now Ambassador to Iran, hammered his hand on the witness table as he recalled having warned another intelligence official last summer to disregard White House "feelers" for assistance that would "besmirch the name of the agency."

In testimony late today, Gen. Robert E. Cushman Jr., the Marine Corps Commandant who had been Mr. Helms' deputy in 1971, described a "request from John D. Ehrlichman that prompted him to rewrite a memorandum that would

have linked the former White House aide to E. Howard Hunt, one of the Watergate conspirators.

Both former intelligence officials clung under oath today to testimony conflicting sharply with the sworn statements made earlier by Mr. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman in their appearances before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities.

Mr. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's former domestic affairs adviser, insisted in his testimony that he had no recollection of a 1971 telephone call to General Cushman to arrange for Hunt to get C.I.A. spying equipment and false identity papers.

But General Cushman, recanting a Jan. 10, 1973, memorandum in which he said he "cannot recall at this late date who placed the call," testified this afternoon that the official minutes of a July 8, 1971, C.I.A. staff meeting showed that he

Continued on Page 11, Column 5

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

"definitely stated" Mr. Ehrlichman had placed the call to him.

Ambassador Helms challenged testimony given earlier this week by Mr. Haldeman, the President's former chief of staff, about a meeting in the White House on June 23, 1972—six days after the Watergate break-in.

According to Mr. Haldeman's account of the meeting, Mr. Helms and the current deputy director of the C.I.A., Lieut. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, had been unable to assure him that the Watergate inquiry being conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation would not compromise intelligence activities in Mexico.

Mr. Helms said today, however, that Mr. Haldeman had made only "an incoherent reference" to a potential problem in Mexico and had not sought his judgment on it directly. Instead, Mr. Helms went on, Mr. Haldeman had turned to General Walters and instructed him to tell the F.B.I. that it would be "desirable" for the investigation in Mexico to be "either tapered off or reduced."

Request Countermanded

Mr. Helms said that when he and General Walters left the White House he told his deputy to disregard Mr. Haldeman's instructions and to confine himself to reminding L. Patrick Gray 3d, then the acting director of the F.B.I., that the two agencies had a long-standing agreement to notify each other if their investigations crossed paths.

Subsequently, Ambassador Helms said, he learned that funds contributed to President Nixon's re-election committee had been channeled to one of the Watergate burglars through a lawyer in Mexico City and that the intelligence agency

had assured the F.B.I. that it had no connection with the lawyer.

Much of the testimony that Mr. Helms and General Cushman gave to the Senate committee today consisted of an oft-told tale. They had already testified in closed sessions before four separate Congressional committees with jurisdiction over the C.I.A.

Insight and Twists

This was the first appearance by the two men before the Watergate inquiry's national television audience, however, and they provided some new twists to their testimony and considerable insight into the world of professional intrigue.

Ambassador Helms, a cigarette chain-smoker at ease in front of the Senators and cameras in his diplomatic pinstripes, called the Watergate burglary "amateurish in the extreme" and explained that breaking and entering without getting caught was something better left to those who did it full time.

General Cushman, his four silver stars gleaming on his Marine Corps olive drab uniform, spoke of a downtown Washington "safe house" where the spy tools were turned over to Hunt in secrecy. And he discussed the tape recording he had made secretly of a meeting with Hunt on July 22, 1971.

Some Ordinary Talk

According to the transcript of the meeting in the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters, old hands at the spying business engage in dialogue such as this:

MR. HUNT: If you pardon my sayimng so, you see to have lost a little weight.

GENERAL CUSHMAN: Yes, I've taken some off. I sort of go up and down. When I go down it's because I go on the

wagon and don't eat very much at all, and this is hell to pay when you're being entertained and going to embassies and dinners."

More importantly, the testimony at the Watergate hearings today produced some additional conflicts in a record already burdened with contradictory versions of the break-in and cover-up last year.

Mr. Helms told the Senators that he had "genuine regrets about being pressured" into assisting the White House in 1971 in developing a psychological profile of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who had made public the secret Pentagon papers earlier that year.

But he contradicted testimony by Mr. Ehrlichman that it had been necessary for a White House special intelligence unit — whose members included Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, another Watergate conspirator—to try to obtain Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatric files. Hunt and Liddy directed a break-in at the office of Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist in September, 1971.

Resignation Described

Mr. Helms said that the psychological profiles that the C.I.A. prepared on foreign officials were based almost entirely on general background information that might provide clues to the character of the individuals. He said that they were not based on psychiatric records and that he had not known of the 1971 burglary until this year.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the ranking Republican on the committee, sought at one point to challenge Mr. Helms for having failed to conduct his own investigation into the Watergate case.

Noting that several of the Watergate burglars had once worked for the agency and that

one of them, Eugenio R. Martinez, was still on a \$100-a-month C.I.A. retainer at the time of the Watergate break-in, Senator Baker asked why Mr. Helms had not sought to determine the motive for the burglary.

Mr. Helms said that it would have been "improper" for the C.I.A. to intrude on a matter under investigation by the F.B.I.

"That's almost exactly what Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman said," Senator Baker shot back.

Mr. Helms said that the intelligence agency had turned over to the F.B.I. all the information it had on the former agents and that he had regarded the inquiry as the F.B.I.'s responsibility.

"And so did the White House," Mr. Baker declared.

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, the committee chairman, interjected that he thought Mr. Helms had been correct in keeping the agency out of a domestic investigation.

Perhaps the most compelling part of Mr. Helms's testimony was his public intimation, in reply to several questions, that he had been forced to resign from the C.I.A. after having declined to assist on matters related to Watergate.

Asked at one point if he had considered resigning, he said, "I thought I could take care of the agency better if I stayed where I was."

He testified that General Walters had been called to the White House on three straight days in June, 1972, by John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, to discuss possible assistance by the C.I.A. in the Watergate cover-up.

Mr. Helm said that his deputy had gone to the meetings only after obtaining assurance from Mr. Ehrlichman that it would be appropriate to deal with Mr. Dean.