

Officials Describe CIA Role

Helms Relates Pressure by White House

By Lawrence Meyer and Peter A. Jay
Washington Post Staff Writers

Two former top officials of the Central Intelligence Agency gave their version before the Senate select Watergate committee yesterday of how the White House involved the agency in the Ellsberg break-in and the Watergate affair.

Former CIA Director Richard M. Helms admitted under questioning that although he knew that at least five of the seven arrested Watergate conspirators had been associated at one time or another with the CIA, he did not conduct a thorough internal investigation to determine their current relationship with the CIA, which is legally authorized to gather and evaluate information on foreign countries.

Specifically, Helms acknowledged that he knew that Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. had been given CIA equipment for an obscure White House purpose in 1971. But after the Watergate break-in occurred in June, 1972, Helms said, he did not inquire for what purpose Hunt had used the equipment.

Helms' testimony yesterday became the focal point of a subtle partisan struggle between committee chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) and vice chairman Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.).

Baker, seizing on Helms' explanation of why he was not suspicious in June, 1972,

about the 1971 CIA assistance to Hunt, drew an analogy to President Nixon's assertions that he was ignorant about the Watergate cover-up until March, 1973. Baker also offered an analogy, based on Helms' admission that he made no internal CIA inquiry, to the explanation by former top White House aides H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman as to why they had not personally investigated the Watergate affair.

Ervin, for his part, offered biblical citations to defend conflicting testimony that Helms had given in May before the Senate Armed Services Committee and yesterday before the select Watergate committee.

Easily the most elegant witness to testify before the committee in its nine weeks of hearings, Helms is still fit and slender at 60, his graying hair slicked back. He hunched over the microphone as he testified, smoking several Chesterfield cigarettes and fiddling with a matchbook while answering questions.

Helms was followed to the witness table by Gen. Robert E. Cushman Jr., now commandant of the Marine Corps, who was deputy director of the CIA during part of Helms' period as director.

Cushman gave a firsthand account of how in July, 1971, Ehrlichman had made a general request that the CIA give assistance to Hunt, who then worked in the White House.

Both Cushman and Helms testified that they were unaware at the time that the assistance given to Hunt was

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related to a clandestine White House "plumbers" investigation of Daniel Ellsberg. Both men also testified that they were unaware until this year that Hunt had participated in the 1971 burglary of the offices of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. And they said that they had quickly stopped giving Hunt CIA assistance when his demands became excessive.

Helms also conceded that

he had authorized the CIA to prepare a psychiatric profile of Ellsberg after White House aide David Young "pled" with him, arguing that the profile was needed to stop leaks of classified government information.

In his testimony, Helms described conversations and meetings he had with acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III, Haldeman and Ehrlichman immediately following the Watergate break-in.

Helms' version, although agreeing in broad outline with the Senate testimony by Haldeman and Ehrlichman about a crucial meeting on June 23, 1972, disagreed in significant detail and in emphasis from the testimony by the two former White House aides.

President Nixon has said he initiated the meeting through Haldeman and Ehrlichman out of concern that the Watergate investigation might risk exposure of CIA activities. Helms, who was accompanied by deputy CIA director Gen. Vernon E. Walters at the June 23 meeting, testified, however, that the meeting and subsequent "feelers" put out by White House counsel John W. Dean III left him with a feeling that an attempt was being made to "use" the CIA.

A principal allegation being investigated by the Senate Watergate committee is whether the White House actually attempted to enlist the support of the CIA in restraining the FBI investigation to cover-up the Watergate affair, the Ellsberg break-in and other clandestine White House activities.

Helms said Haldeman and Ehrlichman "talked around" him to Walters on June 23 and instructed Walters to see Gray about any FBI-CIA conflict in the Watergate probe.

With clear pride in the agency to which he devoted 25 years of his professional life—six of them as its director—before leaving this year to become ambassador to Iran, Helms said he told Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Gray that the CIA was not involved in the Watergate break-in.

"I assured Mr. Gray that the CIA had no involvement



Yesterday's lead-off witness in the Watergate hearings, Richard Helms, right, is sworn in by Committee Chairman Sen. Sam Erwin.

By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

in the break-in. No involvement whatever," Helms said. "And it was my preoccupation consistently from then to this time to make this point and to be sure that everybody understand that.

"It doesn't seem to get across very well for some reason," Helms continued, as his usually quiet voice rose to a shout, "but the agency had nothing to do with the Watergate break-in.

"I hope all the newsmen in the room hear me clearly now."

Helms acknowledged, however, for the first time publicly, that Watergate conspirator Eugenio Martinez was a \$100-a-month "retainer" to the CIA at the time of the Watergate break-in. Helms said Martinez, a Cuban exile who lives in Miami, provided the CIA with information "from time to time" about other Cuban refugees whom the agency should interview. Helms said Martinez's ties to the CIA were severed immediately after the break-in.

Baker and minority counsel Fred Thompson both asserted, however, that the Martinex association with the CIA at the time, coupled with the former-CIA employment of at least four of the other Watergate conspirators, was sufficient reason on its face for White House concern.

"It seems to me," Thompson said, "that there might well have been concern as to the role of the . . . CIA by all parties involved at this particular time right after the break-in in June of 1972, if in fact one of the persons who had broken in was at that time on retainer by the CIA."

Baker also pursued the same point and forced Helms on the defensive. "I am . . . trying to establish a relationship on which the White House or the CIA would base its perception of the fear that CIA might have been involved in these things," Baker said.

Referring to the previous CIA ties of the Watergate defendants, Martinez's continuing tie at the time of the break-in, and the assistance the CIA gave Hunt in 1971,

Baker said, "We have got the certain knowledge that all these things were discussed between White House staff and CIA staff and I wonder if that doesn't lead us to the idea that when these people are caught that somebody would certainly say, 'well, what was the CIA involvement?'"

Helms responded, in the now familiar reference to hindsight made by so many of the witnesses in the hearings, "There has been a tendency, it seems to me, in recent times to have everything run in reel time, as though all of these things were known and had happened and that, therefore, one would have had the good sense to know this thing or that thing at a certain period of time and I simply was trying to point out that this was not the case."

Baker, however, continued to press his point when he resumed his questioning later. Why, Baker asked Helms, did he not launch an inquiry after the Watergate break-in to determine what Hunt had used the equipment for that the CIA had provided him in 1971.

Helms: Well, quite frankly, as of the time that this was all going on, do you realize that at the time of the Watergate burglary there was no evidence that had ever come to my attention that this equipment had been used for any illegal or improper act?

Baker: But you knew it was outstanding. At the moment you found out this stuff had been issued, this support supplied by the CIA, did you do anything to investigate what it was used for?

Helms: No, sir.

Baker: Why didn't you?

Helms: Frankly, it didn't occur to me.

Helms said he did conduct an internal investigation to determine the relationship of the defendants to the CIA. Helms said that he did not attempt to contact the defendants because they were in jail.

Baker, however, was still

not satisfied. "It strikes me," Baker said, "that here were great indications—maybe hindsight is the only way we can look at this—there were great indications of a deep cross-identification with at least CIA personnel, CIA material, a past history of relationships with CIA . . . and I cannot help saying about the similarities between that contention and I do not do it, but you as director of CIA, is remarkably similar to the contention by the President that he did not know all these other things."

"Well, now, let us halt a minute," Helms answered. "When we looked into these various relationships of these individuals with the agency, we turned over to the FBI everything that we were able to establish about this . . . The FBI was conducting an investigation. They were the proper authorities to do this and quite frankly, I think if I had intruded into this matter at that time, it would have been an improper act on my part.

Baker: That is almost precisely what Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman have told us.

Helms: That may be, sir.

Baker: But you had people in the CIA that you later learned had supplied these wigs and voice altering devices and cameras and processing equipment and aliases and forged documents. Did you go to the people inside the CIA and find out how come they did and for what purpose? You say it was not for the Ellsberg thing. I am consumed by curiosity, what else was going on? What else was it used for?

Helms: Senator Baker, all this is in your record. All of the memoranda, all of the inquiry of the investigations of various individuals in the CIA. You have it there, stacks of papers.

Baker: No part of that record tells me what those things were used for if we exclude the Ellsberg situation.

Helms: I do not know what they were used for.

Baker: What I am saying is why don't you know? Why didn't you find out?

Helms: Because I thought, frankly, that when these individuals had been arrested, that was the FBI's job.

Baker: And so did the

White House.

After a long silence in the crowded Caucus Room, Helms asked Baker quietly, "Was it not the FBI's job?"

"Well," Baker replied, "maybe it was. But I have used the analogy once or twice, and I feel a little ill at ease using it, if I had someone on my staff who was caught red-handed robbing a jewelry store, let alone the Democratic Na-

tional Committee, and I read about it in the newspaper then or later, I have a hunch that I would have jumped up and down and screamed until I found out what happened."

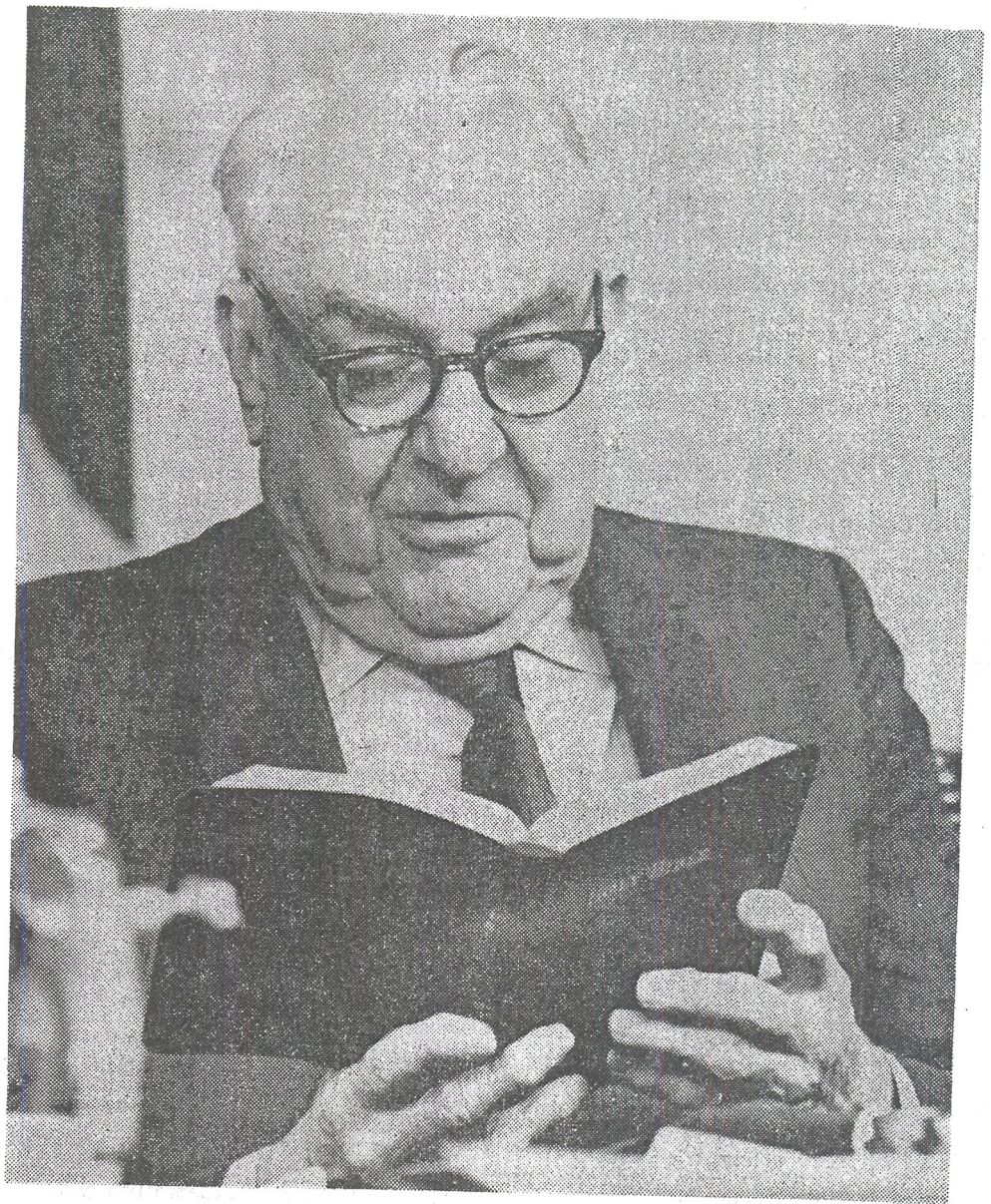
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As he testified, Helms left the indelible impression of a man fiercely proud of the agency he had directed and served "from the day its doors opened in 1947." Proud of the CIA, Helms also suggested with an occasional terse comment and an unspoken gesture that his patrician pride in himself had been wounded by his brush with the Watergate affair.

Periodically during his testimony, Helms described his concern at the "feelers" being put out by the White House, first by Haldeman and Ehrlichman and then by White House counsel Dean, and usually through Walters, to draw the CIA into the Watergate affair.

According to Helms, he was so concerned about the CIA being drawn in to the Watergate affair that he told Walters "that I wanted him to be absolutely certain that he permitted nothing to happen using the agency's name, facilities or anything else in connection with this business.

"I said I did not care whether he wanted to be a scapegoat, I did not care whether he was prepared to quit on the issue, I did not care anything about that, I simply wanted him to do absolutely nothing because I told him point blank even though he was a military officer and even though he was a presidential appointee, that if he did something wrong, it would besmirch the name of the agency . . . And as he reported to me



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Chairman Sam Ervin turns to the Bible to make a point during Watergate hearings.

on the subsequent two conversations with Mr. Dean, I not only reaffirmed this, but I said, 'You hang in there, you are doing fine, but don't you yield an inch.'"

At another point, Helms said, "I have been around a long time and I thought I understood pretty well what we were supposed to do and not supposed to do and if there are any sins the agency has committed, they are on my shoulders, I am not palming them off on anybody else. I knew the ground rules and I knew the laws and all the rest of it and I did my very best to keep the agency free and clear and sailing straight."

Did it ever occur to him,

Helms was asked, to tell President Nixon about the "unusual things" going on in the White House.

"Well," he replied, "my preoccupation at that time, and through all these months was to keep the agency at a distance from this whole problem . . . and since we had stood firm, it seemed to me that that was adequate under the circumstances."

Inevitably, the questioning turned to why Helms had resigned as CIA director.

"I had a conversation with the President after the election, I believe it was on Nov. 20 at Camp David, and we talked about it, my future, and he indicated that he

wanted to make a change, and this was in the context of making a lot of changes in the Administration.

"I was at that time push-

ing 60 and about to come to what we had in the agency as the regular retirement age . . . and this, therefore, seemed a good time to do this. That is why I left," Helms said.

"You did not have any impression that you were being pushed out?" Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.), asked.

"Well, it was not put to me that way, anyway," Helms said.

"In other words," Talmadge said, "when the President makes a suggestion, you do not have to determine whether you have been pushed, shoved or led, do you?"

The audience laughed audibly, but Helms gave only a sardonic, silent laugh as he nodded his head curtly.

"Would that be an affirmative answer?" Talmadge asked. Helms nodded again, without speaking. "Thank you, sir," Talmadge said.

"Giving assistance to the presidency," Helms said in a bitter remark while testifying before one of the four other committees that summoned him in May about the CIA role in these matters, "has not been a crime until recently."

During a break in the hearings, Helms was asked by a reporter if he resented having been involved. No, Helms said, he did not resent it. That was part of his job as CIA director, part of the "whole ball of wax," he said.

"Obviously I'd rather not be here. I'm not cheerful about being here," he said, "but one takes life as it comes."

Helms, in his testimony, supplied the committee with

a chronology of the series of meetings following the Watergate break-in at which he and Walters were pressured by White House aides to supply covert funds to the burglars and to cite CIA operations as a reason for curtailing the FBI's investigation of the affair.

The break-in occurred on

June 17, 1972, a Saturday. Helms' chronology follows.

June 23: He and Walters were called to the White House to meet with Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Haldeman, Helms recalled, did most of the talking, and Ehrlichman's contribution "was either to nod his head or smile or to agree with what Mr. Haldeman said."

Haldeman, Helms said, told them "there was a lot of flak about the Watergate burglary, that the opposition was capitalizing on it, that it was going to—it was apparently causing some sort of unidentified trouble" for the White House.

Haldeman also "made what was to me an incoherent reference to an investigation in Mexico," Helms said, "or an FBI investigation running into the Bay of Pigs." He said he told Haldeman he didn't care what was turned up about the Bay of Pigs operation, then nine years past.

Then, Helms testified, Haldeman said that "it has been decided" that Walters would go and see Gray and tell him that in order not to expose CIA operations the FBI investigation should be "tapered off or reduced or something." Haldeman did not flatly say it should be stopped, Helms said.

Both Haldeman and Ehrlichman, in their appearances before the Senate

committee, said that Walters was sent to see Gray simply to assure him personally that no CIA activity would be threatened by the FBI's Watergate investigation.

Helms said he wondered why Walters, his deputy, was given the assignment rather than he himself. Walters, he said, "felt they were asking him to do it because he was an Army officer and used to taking orders."

Walters, as instructed, met with Gray the same day. Afterwards he reported back to Helms, the former CIA director said, and told him Gray has said something "about some money having been sent to Mexico." There was no further explanation at that time as to what Gray was talking about, Helms said.

June 26: On this day, a Monday, Helms said that Walters "told me he had been called by a man he did

not know in the White House named John Dean, and that Dean had asked to see him."

Walters subsequently verified Dean's request with Ehrlichman, Helms said, and then went to the White House. On his return, Helms said, Walters told him "that Dean had raised with him this question of the Watergate burglary, that there were a lot of problems in connection with it, problems unidentified. Was there any way in which the agency could help, and so on."

It was evident to him, Helms said, that "some kind of feelers were being put out to see, A) if there was any agency involvement, or B), whether the agency was prepared to assist in some way which was not at all identified."

It was at this point, Helms recalled, that he told Walters "to be absolutely certain that he permitted nothing to happen using the agency's name, facilities or anything else in connection with this business."

June 27: Dean called Walters in for another meeting, Helms testified, and it was on this day "that the issue first came up of whether or not the CIA out of its covert funds was prepared to provide bail money for the defendants in the Watergate burglary."

Also, Helms said, Dean asked Walters if it would "be possible for the CIA to pay the salaries of these individuals while they served their jail sentences."

Walters told him later that day, Helms said, that he told Dean such proposals were out of the question, and even if they weren't "any exceptional expenditure of this kind would have to be identified with the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

"That obviously cooled Mr. Dean's ardor," Helms said Walters told him.

Helms recalled that "the question of bail and salaries hit me rather hard," and prompted him and Walters to begin keeping detailed memorandums of all meetings on Watergate-related subjects.

June 28: This was the day Walters' third and last

meeting with Dean. Helms said that "my distinct impression . . . was that this was just more feelers and it was relatively short because Dean was getting nowhere with Gen. Walters."

That apparently ended the

efforts to involve the CIA with the Watergate break-in, Helms indicated.

July 6: While Helms was out of the country on a trip to Australia, Walters discussed the case once more with Gray. In a memorandum of that conversation given to a Senate Appropriations subcommittee last May and printed in The New York Times on June 4, Walters wrote that Gray told him he would not try to suppress the investigation.

Gray "did not see why he or I should jeopardize the integrity of our organizations to protect some middle-level White House figures who had acted imprudently," Walters wrote in the memo.

"He was prepared to let this (the scandal) go to Ehrlichman, to Haldeman, to Mitchell for that matter. He felt it important that the tectonics from his would-be protectors from his would-be protectors."

Helms, in his testimony, noted that under the National Security Act of 1947 the director of the CIA is responsible for protecting intelligence sources and plugging leaks of classified information — legislation he said gave Young the "leverage to rather oblige me to go along with an effort" to prepare the psychiatric profile of Ellsberg.

He said he told Young that "we know nothing about Dr. Ellsberg. I have never laid eyes on him in my life. We have no records on him. We know nothing about him and I think this is an imposition to ask us to do this."

But he said Young was insistent and said that both Ehrlichman and Henry Kissinger the President's assistant for national security affairs, gave the project "highest priority."

While the project was being completed, Helms said, "I never heard of anyone being connected with this exercise except Mr. David Young." But last May, he

said, after he had left the CIA, he learned that "Howard Hunt had been present on one occasion anyway, and that he had specifically asked not to inform me that he had been present."

Former deputy CIA director Cushman also provided the committee with a chronology, this one covering the CIA's furnishing of a camera, tape recorder and false identification to Hunt in 1971, and subsequent efforts to establish who ordered that this be done.

Cushman's chronology began on July 7, 1971, when he said Ehrlichman called him, told him that Hunt had been hired as a White House consultant, and said Hunt would be coming over to the CIA to talk with him. He said he had received no such calls from Ehrlichman before, and described this one as "unusual."

July 22, 1971: Hunt, whom Cushman had known off and on for many years, came to his office. They talked alone at Hunt's request, but Cushman — unknown to Hunt — recorded the conversation, a transcript of which was given to the committee.

Hunt, at that meeting, said he had been given "quite a highly sensitive mission by the White House" and asked Cushman to help him. Hunt described

his mission as "a one-time op — in and out."

Hunt explained, Cushman testified, that he had to interview someone, had to do it incognito, and needed false identification and assistance in disguising himself.

Cushman referred Hunt to the CIA's technical services branch, he said, and thought no more about the incident for the time being. But more requests from Hunt soon arrived.

August 18: Hunt requested that a CIA stenographer whom he knew, then stationed in Paris, be brought back to the United States and assigned to him. This request was turned down by Cushman after checking with Helms.

August 30: Other requests from Hunt began to pile up in the technical services division, which referred them to Cushman and Helms. These included requests for rental car credit cards and a New York phone number with an answering service. They also were turned down.

August 31: Cushman wrote Helms a memo saying "I called John Ehrlichman . . .

and explained why we could not meet (Hunt's) requests. I indicated Hunt was becoming a pain in the neck. John said he would restrain Hunt." Helms wrote "good" on the memo, a copy of which was given the committee.

The burglary of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office occurred the next month. Cushman said he did not learn about it until this spring, however, when it became public knowledge at Ellsberg's trial for releasing the Pentagon Papers.

Dec. 13, 1972: William Colby, then a high-ranking CIA official and now the agency's director, was asked by assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen and assistant U.S. attorney Earl Silbert, who were investigating the Watergate affair, who at the White House asked that Hunt be given CIA assistance.

Colby relayed the request to him, Cushman said, and he told Colby he thought it was Ehrlichman.

Jan. 7 or 8, 1973: Colby called him and said Ehrlichman "disputed the phone call incident," Cushman said. So he prepared a memorandum saying either Ehrlichman, Dean or former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson made the request.

But then, he said, "I got two phone calls—one from Mr. Dean saying it couldn't have been him and one from Mr. Ehrlichman saying he was out of town" at the time of the request for assistance to Hunt. So on Jan. 10, Cushman said, he destroyed his copy of the first memo and wrote another—giving no names, saying he "could not recollect at this late date" who made the request.

His secretary kept her stenographic notes of the first memo, however, he said—and a fresh copy was made and given the committee.

In May of this year, Cushman said, he went over old files carefully in preparation for testifying before the CIA oversight committees of Congress, and used them "to corroborate my previous guess that it had been Mr. Ehrlichman" who made the original phone call about Hunt.