

The General in Nixon's Crises

Washington

An angry, jeering mob surrounded the limousine, beating on the roof and chanting anti-American slogans.

Inside the car that hot May afternoon in Caracas 15 years ago was Vice President Richard M. Nixon, who was on a "good will" tour of Latin America. Sitting in the front seat was an American Army Colonel, Dick Walters, who was serving as his interpreter.

Recalling his harrowing experience four years later, Mr. Nixon wrote in his book "Six Crises": "One of the ringleaders — a typical tough thug—started to bash in the window next to me with a big iron pipe. The shatterproof glass did not break, but it splattered into the car. Walters got a mouthful, and I thought for an instant, 'There goes my interpreter.'"

Vernon Anthony Walters survived what Mr. Nixon would call the fourth of his "six crises" and now finds himself, as deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, playing a major role in Mr. Nixon's seventh crisis, the Watergate scandal.

USE

Yesterday Walters, now a lieutenant general, testified before the Senate Watergate committee and was asked why he had not made use of his long acquaintance with Mr. Nixon to warn him about the attempts to involve the CIA in the Watergate coverup.

Walters sought to minimize the relationship that John D. Ehrlichman had reportedly said made him a "good friend of the White House" within the intelligence agency.

As a linguist fluent in eight languages, Walters has served a range of prominent political figures. He was in Paris as an aide to Averell Harriman in the early years of the Cold War, with President Truman at his historic meeting with General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and with President Eisenhower at Geneva in 1953.

More recently, he won the



AP Wirephoto

LT. GEN. VERNON A. WALTERS
He survived the Caracas attack

respect of Democrats like Lincoln Gordon and Sargent Shriver for the grasp of local conditions that he acquired as military attache in the Rio de Janeiro and Paris embassies.

UNORTHODOX

The career of the husky 6-foot-3-inch general has been unorthodox in many ways. He is not a West Point graduate and has never had a field command. Much of his success seems based on his ability as an interpreter and as a military attache who could cultivate extensive contacts in any country to which he was assigned.

This background has reportedly been the object of considerable criticism by CIA career officials who feel that Walter's experience as an attache is insufficient

qualification for the agency post President Nixon chose him for on March 2, 1972.

"His reputation," said one person familiar with the CIA, "is that of a guy who speaks in four or five languages and thinks in none."

But that assessment would be vehemently contested by his friends and supporters, who say that the 56-year-old general is an aggressively brilliant man with a sophistication and perception rare for a soldier.

MIXED

These people describe him as a hard-working and dedicated officer who looks on his skills as an interpreter with mixed emotions, because they have prevented him from attaining the field command that he has always wanted.

In many ways, the course of the CIA official's career was set by his childhood. Born in New York on Jan. 3, 1917, Vernon Walters was the youngest of a wealthy insurance agent's three children. After suffering a series of financial reverses, his father decided in 1923 that the family could live better in France.

The family moved there and during vacations traveled in Europe. Vernon Walters learned Spanish and Italian as well as French.

After graduating from a French lycee, Walters attended Stonyhurst College in England, where a cousin of his mother's, a Jesuit priest, was the rector.

Walters enlisted in the Army as a private in 1941. Within a year he was made an officer in intelligence. By the end of the war he was a major. He decided to make the Army his career.

A bachelor, Walters cared for his mother for many years until her death.

As military attache in Paris, he entertained frequently. He lives more quietly now in the officers quarters at Fort Myer, Va.

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