

SEP 18 1975

POISON ARMS BAN IS CITED BY HELMS

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He Tells Panel He Gave Oral Order to Halt C.I.A. Job, but Did Not Follow Up

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 17—

Richard Helms, the former Director of Central Intelligence, told a Senate committee today that he had issued an oral command to halt the C.I.A.'s biochemical weapons program and to destroy its stockpiles, but that he had never followed up to find out if his order had been carried out.

He also testified that he had never issued a written order on the matter.

Mr. Helms, now the Ambassador to Iran, went before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence accompanied by Thomas Karamessines, his former deputy for covert operations. Mr. Helms told the committee that when he learned in February, 1970, of President Nixon's order that all biochemical weapons be destroyed, he and Mr. Karamessines agreed that the C.I.A. "had no choice but to comply." "We agreed to terminate the program," he said.

Mr. Karamessines told the committee that he and Mr. Helms discussed the matter with Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the director of the Technical Services Division of the C.I.A., which had over-all control of the program. Mr. Karamessines said that it was his "understanding with Gottlieb that all toxins in possession of the agency be returned to Fort Detrick for destruction."

2d Day of Hearings

Mr. Helms and Mr. Karamessines appeared as witnesses in the second day of the Senate committee's public inquiry into why the C.I.A. failed to destroy two deadly biochemical poisons, a shellfish toxin and a poison derived from cobra venom, after the Presidential order in 1970.

The committee's counsel, F.A.O. Schwarz 3d, said that the committee would question Dr. Gottlieb about the poisons and other matters in a closed session on Tuesday. He said, however, that Dr. Gottlieb's lawyers had "indicated" that their client might invoke his constitutional right under the Fifth Amendment not to answer questions that might tend to incriminate him.

If Dr. Gottlieb does invoke the amendment, Mr. Schwarz said, the committee may consider whether it will grant him immunity from prosecution to get the full story on the record.

Mr. Helms told the committee that he knew of an 18-year-old, \$3-million C.I.A. joint program with the Army's Biological Warfare Laboratory at Fort Detrick, Md., to develop biochemical weapons.

He said that he had been aware that the program developed biochemicals and such delivery systems as dart guns, but that he had never ordered such weapons used against human beings. "I don't ever recall considering it, let alone authorizing it," he said.

Mr. Karamessines said that he had "no recollection of the actual use of any of the materials," but acknowledged that if they had been used to kill a watchdog in a foreign operation he might not have been informed. He said that he was sure he had never ordered their use against a human being.

"As Mr. Helms and others who know me are aware, I would not have continued [at the C.I.A.] if there was a requirement for the killing of a human being," Mr. Karamessines said. He has spent some 30 years in covert operations with the Office of Strategic Services and the C.I.A.

Three Made Decision

Mr. Helms testified that before President Nixon ordered biochemical warfare weapons destroyed, he asked a National Security Council committee to study the question. Mr. Helms said, however, that he had not told the committee that the C.I.A. possessed such weapons, mainly because it was not cleared to have such information under national security standards.

He also said that he had never doubted that the President's order applied to the C.I.A. Both Mr. Helms and Mr. Karamessines said that they were "surprised" to learn five years later that all the materials had not been destroyed.

Dr. Nathn Gordon, who was in charge of biochemical materials in the Technical Services Division, testified yesterday that he and two other men in his section had decided to retain supplies of the shellfish toxin and the poison made from cobra venom.

Dr. Gordon said that although he knew about the 1970 Presidential order, he did not regard the materials as being covered under it. Moreover, he said, he had received no written directive from the C.I.A. hierarchy to get rid of the materials.

Today, Mr. Helms said that he had not issued a written order on the matter because Mr. Karamessines and Dr. Gottlieb accepted verbal orders as "orders written in blood." He said that he felt Dr. Gottlieb and Mr. Karamessines were two of the most honorable men in the country, and that he never doubted that the order would be carried out.