

Helms Admits He Knew Mail Opening Illegal

San Francisco Chronicle 13
 * Thurs., Oct. 23, 1975

Washington

Richard Helms, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, testified yesterday that he knew the agency's mail-opening program was illegal, but said he assumed that Allen W. Dulles, the CIA director who started the operation in 1953, had "made his legal peace with it."

Helms, the afternoon's only witness before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, also conceded that a 1970 report to President Nixon, signed by himself and others, stated that the mail-opening operation had been discontinued, was untrue.

But he added that there was "no intention to mislead" the President.

It was disclosed during Tuesday's testimony that the agency

had opened more than 215,000 pieces of mail during a 20-year program in New York between 1953 and 1973, and photographed the exterior of 2,705,726 pieces of mail to and from the United States and the Soviet Union.

Replying to questions about whether the agency had obtained approval of its program from postmasters general, Helms was occasionally at variance with two of the morning's three witnesses, all former postmasters general.

They were J. Edward Day, postmaster general from 1961 to 1963, and Winton Blount, who held the position from 1969 to 1971, and John A. Gronouski, who headed the Post Office from 1963 to 1965.

Gronouski said flatly, and angrily, that he knew nothing of the program and would have opposed it if he had.



UPI Telephoto

JOHN A. GRONOUSKI
 He said nobody told him

This was confirmed both by Helms and by an internal CIA memorandum.

Day, however, said that shortly after he took office in 1961, Helms, Dulles and Cornelius Roosevelt, then a CIA official, visited him, saying they wanted to tell him "something very secret."

Day recalled that his reply was: "Do I have to know about it?" He was told he did not. He added that he was "Sure that I wasn't told anything about opening mail..."

Blount said he was told about a secret "project" in which the Post Office was cooperating with the CIA, but not specifically about mail being opened.

Helms, in his testimony, said he believed that "we told him (Day) the truth about the project," but could not be sure.

A CIA memorandum referring to the briefing with Day says merely that the officials "withheld no relevant details."

As for Blount, Helms said that he recalled taking with him to the Blount briefing "a couple of pieces of what we got out of the program" — typewritten copies of material "that would indicate that we had been reading the correspondence between certain individuals in the United States and the Soviet Union."

Helms said he could not recall if Dulles had told former President Eisenhower about the program, nor whether former President Kennedy had been informed.

He said he might have told President Johnson during a discussion of CIA matters in 1967, adding: "I have no written record of what I told Johnson."

He also said he did not recall telling former President Nixon.

Later, talking to reporters, he told why he had no record about what he might have told these presidents: "You've got to protect the president from the dirty stuff," he said.

"There's got to be a break. The president can't survive (if he is tied to this sort of activity). But somebody's got to take the heat. So let old Helms take it, and I'm taking it. You can't ask the president to sign off on illegal activity."

New York Times

Tanzania Post

Washington

President Ford yesterday nominated James Spain, a career diplomat, as the new U.S. ambassador to Tanzania.

Reuters