

Long-Time Professional Spy

Richard McGarrah Helms

By DAVID E. ROSENBAUM

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 21—When Richard McGarrah Helms presented his credentials as Ambassador to Iran to the Shah last month, the official press in neighboring and not particularly friendly Iraq described Mr. Helms as an "ugly American." To an outsider—one who had seen

Man in the News
Mr. Helms's biography but did not know him personally—that appellation might have seemed apt.

He was a professional spy for most of his adult life and the Director of Central Intelligence in the United States for the last seven years before he became an ambassador.

In fact, he was a high official in the Central Intelligence Agency in 1953 when the agency engineered the overthrow of the Communist-oriented regime then in power in Iran and the return of the Shah to the throne.

But to those who know Mr. Helms, the description of him by the press in Iraq could not have been further from the truth.

Physically, the 60-year-old envoy is slim and dark-complexioned, with graying hair that is just beginning to recede. He keeps himself in outstanding condition, and, if it were not for a slightly jutting lower lip, he would be strikingly handsome.

Personally, he is friendly, gregarious and sensitive to the feelings of others. Women, young and old, find him a charming dinner partner and a smooth dancer. "He's interesting—and interested in what you're saying," says a woman who sees him often at social occasions. "He's well-read and doesn't try to substitute flirting for conversation."

Worried About Agency

Professionally, he worked diligently to improve the public image of the C.I.A., worried about allegations that the agency was overstepping the boundaries of morality and managed to maintain a reputation as a speaker of facts, while avoiding the political fights that often emerged around them.

Throughout his long career at the C.I.A., Mr. Helms was highly regarded in Congress. And it was significant that today, at the conclusion of his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the agency's involvement in the Watergate scandal, he was warmly praised by several of the Senators.



The New York Times

A reputation as a speaker of facts
(Ambassador Helms testifying yesterday)

Stuart Symington, the Missouri Democrat who has encountered Mr. Helms dozens of times across the witness table at Senate hearings and has been with him countless other times at private meetings, dinner parties and family outings, told Mr. Helms today that he had "great faith" in the Ambassador's ability and integrity.

Richard Helms (he prefers not to use his middle name or initial) was born to a family of means in St. Davids, Pa., on March 30, 1913. His father was an Alcoa executive and his maternal grandfather, Gates McGarrah, was

a leading international banker. He was reared in South Orange, N. J., and spent two high school years in Switzerland, where he learned French and German fluently, a fact that was to be a guiding factor in his career.

At Williams College, from which he graduated in 1935, Mr. Helms was clearly the outstanding member of his class—a member of Phi Beta Kappa, class president, editor of the newspaper and yearbook and president of the senior honor society. He was voted by his classmates the member of the class most likely to succeed, the one who was most respected, the one who had done most for the college, the best politician, the second most versatile and the third most popular.

A man who was at Williams with Mr. Helms recalls that "he had a warm smile and a manner that was somehow princely without a trace of intellectual or social superciliousness."

From Williams, Mr. Helms went to Europe as a reporter for United Press and won a brief glimpse of reporter's glory when he had an exclusive interview with Hitler. But his personal and financial situation—he wanted to get married and believed he had to earn more money to raise a family—brought him back to the United States. In 1937, he became national advertising manager for The Indianapolis Times.

Joined Naval Reserve

World War II ended Mr. Helms's newspaper career. Having joined the Naval Reserve, he was assigned, principally because of his linguistic talents, to the Office of Strategic Services. He stayed in intelligence after the war, with the Joint Strategic Services of the War Department, which gave way in 1946 to the Central Intelligence Agency.

From 1946 to 1966, he served as Deputy and Assistant Director of Central Intelligence, and in 1966 he became the first career official to head the C.I.A.

Mr. Helms's first marriage, to the former Julia Shields of Indianapolis, ended in divorce in 1968 after a long separation. His son by that marriage, Dennis, is a lawyer.

Mr. Helms is now married to the former Cynthia McKelvie, an English-born redhead with four grown children from a previous marriage. Both Mr. Helms and his wife are fond of tennis, playing regularly when they are in Washington. In the evenings, they often read out loud to each other, getting special amusement from spy stories, according to Mrs. Helms.

There are many rumors, none of them confirmed as accurate, about the reasons for Mr. Helms's departure as Director of Central Intelligence at the beginning of this year.

Some Reasons Given

One is that Mr. Helms had always insisted on others retiring from the agency at age 60 and that it was thus incumbent upon him to do so. Another is that Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, was dissatisfied with Mr. Helms's direction of intelligence operations, a rumor that Mr. Kissinger has vigorously and publicly denied.

In the last week, another oped with disclosures that Mr. Helms refused to cooperate with H. R. Haldeman and other White House officials in various domestic operations.

When the Foreign Relations Committee asked Mr. Helms today if that was why he was removed from the C.I.A. and sent to Iran, he responded, "I do not know."