

Watergate

Ex-CIA Chief Tells Senators Coverup Pressure

Washington

The former head of the Central Intelligence Agency told the Senate Watergate committee yesterday that he had to resist White House pressures in order to keep the agency clean of involvement in the Watergate coverup.

Richard Helms, the former CIA director who is now ambassador to Iran, pounded on the witness table as he recalled having warned another intelligence official last summer to disregard White House "feelers" for assistance that would "besmirch the name of the agency."

In testimony later in the day, General Robert E. Cushman Jr., the Marine Corps commandant who had been Helms' deputy in 1971, described a "request" from John D. Ehrlichman that prompted him to rewrite a memorandum that would have linked the former White House aide to E. Howard Hunt, one of the Watergate conspirators.

Both former intelligence officials gave testimony conflicting sharply with the sworn statements made earlier by Ehrlichman and by H. R. Haldeman in their appearances before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities.

Ehrlichman, President Nixon's former domestic affairs adviser, insisted last week that he had no recollection of a 1971 telephone call to General Cushman to arrange for Hunt to get CIA spying equipment and false identity papers.

But Cushman testified that the official minutes of a July 8, 1971, CIA staff meeting showed that he "definitely stated that Ehrlichman had

placed the call about Hunt to him.

Cushman testified he had written a memo Jan. 10, 1973, saying he "cannot recall at this late date who placed the call," because Ehrlichman had told him in December he was "out of town" at the time of the first call, and couldn't have made it.

Helms, challenged testimony given earlier this week by Haldeman, the President's former chief of staff, about a meeting in the White House on June 23, 1972 — six days after the Watergate break-in.

According to Haldeman's account of the meeting, Helms and the current deputy director of the CIA, Lieutenant General Vernon A. Walters, had been unable to assure him that the Watergate inquiry being conducted by the FBI would not compromise intelligence activities in Mexico.

Helms said yesterday, however, that Haldeman had made only "an incoherent reference" to a potential problem in Mexico and had not sought his judgment on it directly. Instead, Helms went on, Haldeman had turned to Walters and instructed him to tell the FBI that it would be "desirable" for the investigation in Mexico to be "either tapered off or reduced."

Helms said that when he and Walters left the White House, he told his deputy to disregard Haldeman's instructions and to confine

himself to reminding L. Patrick Gray III, then the acting director of the FBI, that the two agencies had a long-standing agreement to notify each other if their investigations crossed paths.

FUNDS

Subsequently, Helms said, he learned that funds contributed to President Nixon's re-election committee had been channeled to one of the Watergate burglars through a lawyer in Mexico City, and the intelligence agency had assured the FBI that it had no connection with the lawyer.

Much of the testimony that Helms and Cushman gave consisted of an oft-told tale. They had already testified in closed sessions before four separate congressional committees with jurisdiction over the CIA.

This was the first appearance by the two men on Watergate before a national television audience, however, and they provided some additional new twists to their testimony and considerable insight into the world of professional intrigue.

Helms, a cigarette chain-smoker at ease in front of the senators and cameras in his diplomatic pinstripes, called the Watergate burglary "amateurish in the extreme" and explained that

breaking and entering without getting caught was something better left to those who do it full-time.

'SAFE'

Cushman, his four silver stars gleaming on the epaulets of his Marine Corps olive drab uniform, spoke of a downtown Washington "safe house" where the spy tools were turned over to Hunt.

More importantly, yesterday's testimony produced some additional conflicts in a record already burdened with contradictory versions of the break-in and coverup last year.

Regrets

Helms told the senators that he had "genuine regrets about being pressured" into assisting the White House in 1971 in developing a psychological profile of Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked copies of the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times and other newspapers.

Perhaps the most compelling part of Helms' testimony was his public intimation, in reply to several questions, that he had been forced to resign from the CIA after having declined to assist on matters related to Watergate.

Asked if he had considered resigning, he said, "I thought I could take care of the agency better if I stayed where I was."

Helms said that last November 20, President Nixon had told him that he wanted to "make a change" at the agency and wished Helms, who was nearing retirement age of 60, to assume a diplomatic post.

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

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

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