



RICHARD M. HELMS

... his testimony sought

Watergate Calls Helms Home Again

By Laurence Stern

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Once again the Watergate quagmire is drawing Richard M. Helms back to Washington and the Central Intelligence Agency he once headed back into the investigative limelight.

This time Helms is being summoned from his ambassadorial post in Tehran—his fourth Watergate recall—to testify on the CIA's destruction in January, 1973, of tape-recorded phone conversations to determine whether they bore on the White House scandal.

A statement circulated among CIA employees, presumably by authorization of director William E. Colby, said, "We do not know whether a presidential conversation may have been taped, although it is possible," an agency spokesman said yesterday.

Whether the tapes included presidential conversations is one of the central questions in this latest inquiry, which is be-

ing pressed by Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), co-chairman of the Senate Watergate committee.

Baker has been the most persistent and aggressive of the Senate Watergate investigators in pursuing the question of the CIA's implication in the affair—one of the concerns voiced by President Nixon as a "national security" question early in the case.

Mr. Nixon said his May 22 Watergate statement: "Elements of the early post-Watergate reports led me to suspect, incorrectly, that the CIA had been in some way involved." Helms has also steadfastly denied CIA involvement in the case during his repeated appearances before congressional investigators, prosecutors and the Watergate grand jury.

The first word on the CIA's destruction of its own tapes surfaced in a CBS broadcast on Jan. 29. Subsequently Colby acknowledged that the agency had destroyed through "normal procedure" all but one tape from that period.

The one surviving tape, of a conversation on June 22, 1971, between the former CIA deputy director, Gen. Robert E. Cushman, and Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. was recovered because "it was put in a separate drawer somehow," Colby explained in response to original news reports of the CIA tape destruction.

A CIA spokesman also originally claimed that the tapes and transcripts were destroyed on Jan. 18, 1973, during Helms' last month as director. This was one day after a letter from Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) was received by the CIA's congressional liaison office asking that all records or documents be preserved which might bear on the Watergate case "in any way."

Yesterday a CIA spokesman said that the Jan. 18 date "may not be correct" as the time the tapes were destroyed.

"We're trying to determine the exact date and circumstances of destruction and will report to the senator involved," the spokesman said.

The CIA statement said that tapes were "destroyed either shortly after their use or when collection became larger than convenient, specifically 1964 and 1971"—and again in January, 1973.