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NEWSWEEK

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THE PERISCOPE

A Letter From the Chief

One mystery about the now-famous letter that got CIA chief Richard Helms in such trouble with the Senate has been solved—and replaced with another. Helms said an aide had written the letter (praising a St. Louis Globe Democrat editorial that blasted Sen. J. William Fulbright)

and that he had signed it without reading it. The aide was Col. Stanley Grogan, an old CIA hand and the "silent service's" spokesman. The new mystery is how Grogan could have committed such an obvious public-relations gaffe.

The Washington Star
1 August 1966

POINT OF VIEW

CIA Comes in From the Cold

By MARY McGRORY
Star Staff Writer

Everybody likes the Central Intelligence Agency a little better now.

People who thought it should never exist and hate what they think it is doing look at it today with something like open affection.

Chairman J. William Fulbright of the Foreign Relations Committee, its severest critic, is awash in clandestine gratitude and mirth. Whatever it did at the Bay of Pigs, the CIA has done a lot for him.

Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy, D-Minn., who recently and in vain tried to bring it to heel, is all secret smiles at having caught its master spy writing in all-too-visible ink.

No Public Thanks

Nobody can thank CIA director Richard M. Helms publicly for what he did, which was to provide the city with some desperately needed comic relief. So for the record, everybody has to regard the perfect little calamity which delivered him to his enemies on Capitol Hill as a frightful lapse in ethics, deportment and security.

Actually, the Helms letter to the editor of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat in praise of an editorial that was entitled "Brickbats for Fulbright" and called the senator "crafty" has reassured a hot and tired city. There will always be a bureaucrat to make life worth living.

Connoisseurs of the rather meager literature of catastrophic letters have decided the Helms entry ranks with Ezra Taft Benson's celebrated mishap of 10 years ago. Over the signature of the Secretary of Agriculture went a letter saying "It is excellent" of an article in Harper's Magazine which referred to the farmers



RICHARD M. HELMS

of America as "pampered tyrants."

Cries for Benson's resignation ran through the Senate until it was discovered the missive was the work of a sub-secretary who was merely carrying out a department directive to reply to all critical communications "as politely as possible."

Neither Wrote Nor Read

What gives the Helms' epistolary disaster its special flavor is that while he did not write it — or even, he admitted in a special senatorial session called to savor the affair, read it — it sounds as though he had written it himself.

It had the ring of sincere expression, as a good letter should. It was, in fact, rather admirable in its terseness and cordiality and shows that the silent service, whatever its failures, is making progress against federal prose.

But senators, who employ scribes themselves, are blind to the style at such moments. They found the letter "offensive" and, in regard to Fulbright, "inaccurate." They

professed themselves, with straight faces, to be "shocked" and "disappointed." Men who may privately agree with both the editorial-writer and the letter-writer rushed to the defense of their beleaguered colleague. Fulbright's foes on the Armed Services Committee, who had fought what one had called his attempt "to muscle in" on the surveillance of the CIA, praised his patriotism, his intellect and his heart.

This was, of course, not what Helms' still anonymous scribe had in mind. He was responding to a new directive in the CIA, which is to make the agency seem more lovable, less secretive.

Like Anybody Else

The CIA, like other agencies and other men, wishes to participate openly in the life of its times. Its response to harsh criticism has been an attempt to prove that it is really like anybody else, not exactly, mind you, but more than most people think.

Maybe 007 would have liked to join the local men's club and be a member of the bowling team. Such an impulse is obviously stirring in the shrouded CIA. When other people see editorials crowing over the defeat of their enemies, they rush to the writing table and dash off a spirited "well done." "Why can't we?" the CIA asked itself.

Well, it has its answer now as a result of its monitored correspondence. Nobody has a clearer idea of what it is actually doing; but at least people know what it is trying to do. The fact that it can commit a boner right out in the open just like anybody else has brought it a lot closer to a lot of people.

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New Spy At 'Control'

A few eyebrows were raised when President Johnson appointed old Texas friend Admiral William Raborn to head the Central Intelligence Agency a year ago. The quizzical expressions now appear warranted in light of the admiral's resignation as the nation's top spy.

Rumors have cropped up frequently about dissension in the CIA ranks. The complaints ranged from underlings' unhappiness with Raborn's "old salt" approach to running the super-secret spy ship to his ignorance of world affairs. One anonymous lieutenant told a newsman not long ago that Raborn didn't know an oligarchy from a benevolent despot — that it was impossible to deal with foreign countries unless you knew a great deal about them.

In this context the appointment of CIA career man Richard Helms to replace Raborn should be a happy one all-around. Indeed, colleagues of Helms were quick to praise the President's choice. Helms is a former United Press International reporter, a Phi Beta Kappa, and has served in intelligence since he joined the Navy in World War II. After serving with the War Department's Strategic Services Unit, he went with the Central Intelligence Group which was formed in 1947.

Helms believes — and no doubt his colleagues share his view — that a lot of the criticism aimed at the CIA has been unfair, that on the whole the agency has done a good job over the years. Because

of the cloak-and-dagger operations of the spy outfit, the general public can only hope their faith is justified. The reason is simple: only the CIA and a few Congressmen and Senators know of the organization's successes. These successes, for obvious reasons, are not hailed to the skies. As for failures, they rise to the surface in a variety of ways, causing all sorts of embarrassment.

When the celebrated invasion of Cuba failed during the Kennedy Administration, the CIA shared scapegoat privileges with Adlai Stevenson and other Presidential advisers who backed away from U. S. air support of the operation. Intelligence operatives at that time assured the invaders that the rank-and-file Cubans would rise to join them and throw off the bearded tyrant, Castro. We all remember the Bay of Pigs. The CIA took its lumps then, and serious questions arose about its efficiency.

A more recent example of blatant exposure that caused the CIA, the U. S. government, and the academic world acute embarrassment was the University of Michigan's brief involvement with clandestine government operations in South Viet Nam. The university officials patched up some of the damage by confessing that they acted as a front unwittingly for certain guerrilla operations but that once the facts were known, severed all connections with them.

The position of the Michigan people was obvious. If they, as re-

search scholars in a friendly country, were exposed as knowing participants in spy activities, then all academic work being performed by Americans in dozens of haven-not countries might be placed in jeopardy.

When Admiral Raborn took over, he closed the CIA's public affairs office, his point being that the spy agency had no public affairs. This has been true, for the most part. The U. S. government has never been eager to broadcast either the failures or successes of the agency. Even the money appropriated for the CIA is wrapped in omnibus measures, carefully camouflaged. Unhappy congressmen, the press, or angry government officials in foreign countries have been the main sources of CIA lid-opening. In the first two instances the question has been: why did this happen? In the latter: Doesn't Yankee meddling show clearly American imperialist designs? The CIA is silent or cryptic as possible in the face of either eventuality.

It will be interesting to see if Raborn tells all about his tenure of office. We assume that he will not. Any 'inside' report will likely come from columnists who have valuable contacts in spy circles — and even they will remain anonymous.

What is important now, however, is to get on with the necessary business of spying. Mr. Helms should bring a fresh impetus to a government agency that for good reason or not hasn't been happy with things at "control." Agents and the spy hierarchy shouldn't have any trouble in communicating with the new boss. He is one of them.