

editorials

## CIA footnotes

In his first public address since he became director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) five years ago, Richard Helms defended his organization before a luncheon meeting of newspaper editors Wednesday, and said that the CIA is necessary for the survival of a democratic society. He asked the country "to take it on faith that we, too, are honorable men devoted to her service."

Helms did not attempt to clarify any foundation for that faith, although he did note that CIA intelligence played an important part in determining the American success in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis (thanks to "a number of well-placed and courageous Russians who helped us").

Elsewhere in Washington on the same day, Sen. George McGovern asked Helms to comment on published reports that South Vietnamese Vice-President Nguyen Cao Ky may be involved in the opium trade in Southeast Asia. He cited a recent article in Ramparts magazine implicating the CIA in an international opium business. The Ramparts article contended that opium production and distribution in the Fertile Triangle region of Burma, Northern Thailand, and Laos is conducted with the knowledge of the CIA, and that CIA operations there actually serve to protect opium supplies and facilitate their movement. ✓

Helms did not comment on the allegations; apparently an admonition from the director every five years that Americans must accept the CIA "on faith" should be sufficient.

There might be more to it: that Helms should offer a footnote to American diplomatic history almost ten years after the incident happened suggests a possible precedent. Perhaps, in another five years or so, the CIA director will emerge from his office once more, and renew his request for an extension of public faith in his agency. And then he might add another footnote about how the CIA almost won that Vietnam War all by itself.