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WEEKLY - 524,212

JUL 14 1973

With Apologies, Promises, and Guarded Views, The CIA's Designated Boss Faces Senate Quiz

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FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

William E. Colby wore a conservative cut gray suit of muted glen plaid. He had neatly brushed back his closely cut hair, now beginning to gray. His glasses had colorless plastic rims. His height and weight, perhaps five feet nine and 150 pounds, is average. There's nothing distinctive about his face. If you passed him on the street, you wouldn't glance at him twice. Maybe not even once.

And that's fine with Bill Colby, American spy.

Colby's gray look served him well during nearly three decades with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its predecessor. It has been a good cover for his derring-do. And he saw no reason to change that look last week when he testified publicly on his nomination to become America's chief "spook," the director of the CIA.

In 90 minutes of polite and guarded testimony—more like conversation with than an investigation by Sen. Stuart Symington, acting chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee—Colby provided a rare peek at U.S. spy operations. He reluctantly mentioned the mysterious "40 Committee." He admitted the CIA erred in helping Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt. He promised the CIA would stay out of domestic spying, except when it relates to foreign intelligence. He conceded that CIA involvement in Laos got out of hand. And he supported a move to tell the public more about the spy agency.

Watergate Matters

Colby testified in the Senate Caucus Room—temporarily vacated by the Senate Watergate committee—answering questions from Symington, the only committee member present. Gently but firmly, the Missouri Democrat pressed Colby for his views on CIA involvement in Watergate-related matters and what he would do if similar problems recurred.

Does Colby believe that the National Security Act of 1947, which created the CIA, prohibits the CIA from preparing psychological profiles of American citizens? Not always, Colby replied, citing profiles made of CIA job applicants. But the CIA was wrong, he said, in preparing a profile of Daniel Ellsberg, who had been indicted for theft of the Pentagon papers. "I don't know how to deal with things," Colby declared.

What about the CIA providing a special camera, tape recorder, and disguise for E. Howard Hunt, which he used in a burglary of the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist? Would Colby permit that

persisted, and Colby finally said the name was now 40 Committee. Who's the chairman? "I'd really prefer not to. . . ." Who's the chairman? "All right, it's Henry Kissinger." Symington wished him luck in dealing with Kissinger.

Despite this reticence, Colby said the Senate and the American people need to know more about the CIA. "I think it's essential in the U.S. today; I favor great-

kind of involvement?

'Never Again'

"In that case a mistake was made, and it will not be made again," Colby pledged. "We must be very careful with our unique equipment so it won't be used wrongly. We insist on knowing precisely what is done with that equipment."

The CIA's main focus, as required by law, "must be foreign intelligence," Colby said. But the agency must conduct some activities in the United States: recruiting employes, contracting with American companies for equipment, talking with a



Bill Colby: 'A mistake was made.'

"large number" of American citizens who provide useful information about foreign matters, and talking with many foreigners who live in the United States.

There are also "certain support activities" in the United States "to give our people abroad a reason for being abroad, so they will not appear to be CIA people," Colby said. He didn't say so, but for several years in the 1950s, Colby was supposedly a "Foreign Service officer" at American embassies in Stockholm and Rome; but there's no doubt he was really a CIA agent.

'It Was a War'

Symington was irked by recent CIA activity in Laos, where the agency has admitted it trained and managed a 30,000-man army. "A lot of our operations in Laos had as much to do with intelligence as the production of carpets in Binghamton, N.Y.," sputtered Symington. "It was a war!"

Colby calmly agreed that the CIA went beyond realistic bounds in Laos. Covert operations don't work when they get too big, he explained, citing as examples Laos and the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.

Symington quizzed Colby carefully about a little-known U.S. intelligence committee that over the years has had different names: 303 Committee, 40 Committee, among others. "It includes certain operations of the CIA, is that correct?" Symington asked.

Colby parried, saying he preferred to answer in a private session. Symington er disclosure." He admitted it won't be easy to decide on the information to make public. **Incorrect as received.**

The only aspect of his personal spy career that Colby talked about was "Operation Phoenix," which he headed in South Vietnam from 1968 to 1971. He denied some critics' charges that it was an "assassination program." It was a method of identifying Viet Cong and North Vietnamese guerrilla leaders in South Vietnam, and a goal was to reduce the number of unnecessary killings, he contended.

Colby wasn't asked about his daring early career. In 1913 he joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's predecessor, and parachuted into France behind enemy lines. Later he parachuted into northern Norway to destroy a railroad used to transport Nazi soldiers.

After the war he graduated from Columbia Law School—his undergraduate work was at Princeton University—and joined a New York City law firm headed by William J. Donovan, former OSS chief. Colby took a Government job in 1949, and since then, under various covers, he has been with the CIA.

At 53, he's about to cap his career. President Nixon nominated Colby to fill the CIA director's job vacated by James Schlesinger, who became secretary of Defense. Senate confirmation is assured if Symington's attitude in any indication; after last week's hearing he promised to vote for Colby.

With that promise in hand, Colby got up, walked from the room, and blended easily into a crowd in the corridor.