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MARIANNE MEANS

Why Ford Asked Colby To Hang Around

Informed sources within the Central Intelligence Agency report that the real reason President Ford was forced to ask CIA chief William Colby to hang around a while longer after he was fired is named Gen. Vernon A. Walters — the agency's deputy director.

Allowing Walters to become acting chief could have proved to be very embarrassing.

Walters is the only major participant in the Watergate scenario still to be in his original powerful position. He survived, in part, by going underground.

But as acting director he would have had to surface to testify in the coming weeks before the continuing House and Senate probes into the agency's illegal abuses of power. His role as CIA spokesman might well have prompted awkward questions as to why President Ford had allowed him to stay.

In addition, Walters' testimony might have opened up a whole new line of congressional inquiry. Both the Senate and House committees have thus far concentrated upon Colby and virtually ignored Walters.

Yet he was regarded at one time as such a good friend of President Nixon that high-level White House aides considered him their best link to the agency. Indeed, testimony before a House subcommittee indicated that John Dean and others at the White House had dealt with Walters during the Watergate crisis rather than then-director Richard Helms because they assumed that as a military man close to Nixon he would respond with unquestioning compliance.

Walters is also believed to be privy to the most sensitive CIA secrets. He has had a long background in intelligence work, much of it unofficial but most of it involving coordinating extremely sensitive material.

"He's been a high-class messenger boy," one source said.

CIA sources are divided as to his ability, but they agree that it might not be helpful to President Ford if he testified. For one thing, he would be under great pressure to be as truthful as Colby is credited with being. Telling lies is not as fashionable as it used to be during the Nixon Administration. Helms, for instance, is being investigated by the Justice Department for possible perjury.

"This association with Nixon might catch him between Kissinger and Schlesinger," a CIA official observed. "He knows a lot."

"After Watergate, I am amazed that he was able to stay on," observed another agent.

Walters was a prime witness at both the Senate Watergate probe and the court trial of Nixon's former White House aides. He testified that White House aides had asked him to lean on FBI Director Patrick Gray to stop a probe of Nixon campaign funds from Mexico which had turned up in the bank account of one of the men arrested during the Watergate break-in in June, 1972. He submitted memos he had written after his White House contacts describing the efforts to enlist both the CIA and FBI in the coverup of the scandal.

Walters presented a picture of staunch CIA resistance to becoming involved in the coverup after the Watergate burglary. He also insisted the CIA did not know it was being used for improper purposes prior to the break-in, when it provided equipment to White House agent E. Howard Hunt Jr. that was later used in the crime.

It was also clear, however, that the CIA resisted not because of some ethical distaste but because it feared being exposed.

The awkwardness of such a situation apparently didn't occur to the President in his initial haste to

dump Colby, as a large number of other things about his dramatic Cabinet shuffle did not seem to occur to him. It will be a substantial period before China envoy George Bush can assume command, because he must first arrange the President's Decem-

ber trip to China and then he faces what appears to be developing into a serious and potentially long confirmation fight. So the President ate a platter of crow in public and leaned on Colby's professional pride to persuade him to delay his departure.

Citation

The Director of Central Intelligence
awards the Distinguished Intelligence Medal to

VERNON A. WALTERS

Lieutenant General, United States Army

Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

in recognition of his outstanding performance of his moral and legal responsibilities as the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence. General Walters intensively learned the details of the Agency's mission, organizational structure and activities. His exceptional talents in human relations made him a highly effective representative of the organization in dealings with foreign intelligence officials and other members of the United States Government. Behind his outward appearance of informality and conviviality, he displayed the highest qualities of moral integrity and rigid adherence to his constitutional responsibilities, despite a number of severe pressures to lead him to a contrary position. General Walters' actions made a major contribution to the Central Intelligence Agency and reflect great credit on him, the United States Army, and the Federal service.