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CIA's Walters Rips Fishbowl Operation

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Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

Intelligence-gathering operations by the U.S. are more vital today than at any time in American history, and "here we are rummaging through the garbage pails of the '50s," Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, declared here.

Walters' defense of the CIA and his scathing attack on "those who would prefer the nation be operated in a fishbowl" brought 5,000 delegates to the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention here to their feet with rousing cheers and applause.

His address yesterday followed another keynote speech by Richard L. Roudebush, national director of the Veterans Administration.

"Sure we are in a period of detente," said Walters. "But look what is happening — the Soviet Union has developed four new missile systems and is soon going to deploy a fifth and is constantly improving its submarines, aircraft and manpower.

"Yet, at a time of greatest need, we see a massive attack on intelligence as immoral and unconstitutional."

He said it is ironic that the attack comes in the bicentennial year because America's forefathers used intelligence to defeat the British.

"George Washington established a listening post and 'bugged' the British headquarters in Philadelphia," said Walters, and "Benjamin Franklin, as assistant postmaster for the British colonies from 1772 to 1775, opened the British mail."

He said the nation cannot turn the tides of communism by disclosing all its secrets and expressed hope that the current probe of CIA practices during the last 25 years will develop "useful guidelines."

"I am not a pessimist," Walters added. "I have faith in the good sense of the American people and their representatives in government. I have faith their good sense will prevail and we'll pull through these troubled times."

On another front, Roudebush defended the largest VA budget in its history — \$18 billion.

"America is no longer satisfied with an old-soldiers-home approach to veterans' care and has not been for some time," he said. "The price of educational benefits, kidney transplants and wheelchair homes was something early budget makers did not have to be concerned with."

He said VA activities are among the most important functions of government and that the cost of veteran aid is part of the price of war.

Roudebush told the delegates that veterans' affairs probably will not undergo any cataclysmic changes as memories of the Vietnam War recede but the need to continue certain programs is critical.

The VA administrator, anticipating questions about the deaths of patients in the veterans hospital in Ann Arbor,

Mich., said he feels "great sorrow and humility" and has dispatched a team of the "best scientific minds at my disposal" to aid the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the probe.

"When all the answers are known, my office will be completely open and candid with all concerned," he said.

In a related development yesterday, the National VFW Auxiliary gave \$10,000 to the California Hospital Medical Center's cancer-study division.

The week-long convention ends tomorrow.

Dr. John Wasylik, 48, a Sandusky, Ohio, optometrist, also was elected junior vice commander-in-chief for the national group. He will be eligible to become national commander in two years. Wasylik is a veteran of the Korean War and former head of the Ohio VFW.



Herald-Examiner photos

Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, CIA deputy director, defends agency at VFW convention.