

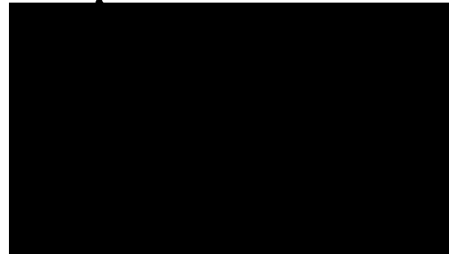
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President Defends CIA in Viet Nam

Agency Chief Not Sacked, Just 'Transferred': Kennedy

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BY PETER LISAGOR

Our Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON—The Central Intelligence Agency is following orders to the letter in South Viet Nam, according to President Kennedy.

And so, by that curious logic that compounds the mystery of any hush-hush operation, the CIA chief in Saigon is being "transferred."

This was the President's word for what others have called a sacking of John Richardson, the CIA chief in question. Mr. Kennedy brought up Richardson's name himself in denying the CIA was carrying out independent operations in South Viet Nam.

He called Richardson a "dedicated public servant."

RICHARDSON'S return here for reassignment follows a series of dispatches from South Viet Nam alleging the CIA had gone into business for itself, accounting for the confusion over precisely what impact President Ngo Dinh Diem's repressive policies were having on the U.S.-supported war against the Communist Viet Cong guerrillas.

The President defended the

CIA in Viet Nam, saying the charges are unfair and certifying that it has "done a good job."

Mr. Kennedy was primed for the question at his news conference. He noted he had looked through the record "very carefully" over the last nine months and found nothing to indicate the CIA "has done anything but support policy."

He called the stories inspired by Richardson's reported transfer as "surmises."

BUT THE FACT is that Richardson's status was ordered changed after the stories appeared, not before, leaving the distinct impression that he was a victim of possible differences with either the new ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, or with authorities back here.

The former director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, recognized Richardson's recall and the stories of U.S. differences over how to deal with the Diem regime as a classic case of finding a "goat."

It may be better for the CIA "to be tarred in the Vietnamese mess," Dulles was quoted as saying, than the president or secretary of state.

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