

BALTIMORE SUN
6 August 1986

Investigators say briefing of Helms aide preceded intelligence leak to Chile

By Stephens Broening
Washington Bureau of The Sun

WASHINGTON — Within hours after an aide to Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., was given an intelligence briefing on Chile last month, secrets were betrayed to the Chilean military dictatorship, according to administration officials close to an investigation of the senator and his staff.

The disclosure was said by these officials to involve information that the United States had obtained a confidential report by the Chilean armed forces on the military's involvement in the death of a young Chilean resident of the United States.

Sources said the armed forces report sharply contradicted initial Chilean allegations that the victim, Rodrigo Rojas de Negri, 19, had accidentally set himself on fire July 2 during a demonstration in Santiago, the Chilean capital.

Eyewitnesses to the incident have said that uniformed men with blackened faces beat Mr. Rojas and a young woman and set them on fire. Mr. Rojas died four days later; the woman survived. An investigating magistrate has indicted a lieutenant for manslaughter in connection with the death.

Administration officials would not say exactly when the United States got the confidential report, but they suggested that its receipt played a role in the repeated insistence by the U.S. government that Chilean authorities thoroughly investigate the Rojas death and punish any wrongdoers.

On July 9, State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb said eyewitness accounts of the incident "should be critical in determining the facts" in the Chilean investigation. Two days later, on July 11, Mr. Kalb said that for the Chilean inquiry to be credible, it "must take into account" eyewitnesses "as well as other relevant factual information."

Administration officials said they could not reveal how the United States had obtained the confidential Chilean report or whether a source

in the Chilean military had been compromised by the disclosure to Chilean authorities that the United States had the document.

News that the Chileans were aware of the leak came during a visit to Chile July 13-18 by Robert S. Gelbard, a deputy assistant secretary of state. The information was quickly relayed to the State Department in

Washington, which informed the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The committee on July 18 asked the Justice Department to investigate a possible breach of confidentiality.

Sources close to the investigation said they had no cause to believe that Senator Helms or Christopher Manion, the aide who got the secret briefing on Chile by the Intelligence Committee, had themselves passed secrets to the Chileans.

One administration official said he understood the information was conveyed to a senior Chilean in Santiago by telephone from Washington.

Under Senate rules, it is forbidden for senators or committee staff members to divulge classified information received at Intelligence Committee briefings except at closed sessions.

Senator Helms has reacted strongly to reports that he and his staff are the object of an investigation. On Monday, he accused the State Department of trying "to intimidate me and harass me."

The senator and the State Department have long been at odds over aspects of U.S. policy in Latin America, an area of special interest to Mr. Helms, who is chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs.

In the case of Chile, the State Department is trying to push the dictatorship into a transition to democratic government. Mr. Helms supports the dictatorship as a bulwark against communism in the hemisphere, and he came to the regime's defense during a visit to Chile July 9-13. Mr. Helms said, among other things, that U.S. Ambassador Harry Barnes had "planted the American flag in the midst of a communist activity" by attending funeral services

for Mr. Rojas.

Administration officials said yesterday that as a result of Mr. Helms' statements in Chile, the State Department helped arrange a briefing for the senator by the Intelligence Committee, so that, as one official put it, "we could play from the same sheet music."

A briefing was set up for the senator, officials said, but Mr. Manion, the senator's chief aide on the Foreign Relations Committee, attended in his stead. The officials said the briefing was held during the week of July 14-18.

Details of the confidential Chilean armed forces report apparently were disclosed to the senator's aide in an attempt to bring Senator Helms and his staff over to the State Department's side, said officials who did not attend the briefing.

Attempts to reach Mr. Manion by telephone yesterday were unsuccessful.