

NEW YORK TIMES

11 MAY 1973

Nixon's Choice to Head the C.I.A.

William Egan Colby

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 10—William Egan Colby, named today as the new chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, is one of the few professionals to rise to the top of a major Government department: He is a career clandestine operative.

The 53-year-old Mr. Colby's involvement with intelligence work dates to 1943, when, responding to a call for French-speaking volunteers, he joined the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the C.I.A., and parachuted behind enemy lines in France to join a Resistance unit.

He continued his O.S.S. service through the rest of the war, then took time to obtain a law degree from Columbia University and work in the New York City law firm, headed by Maj. Gen. William S. Donovan, the former head of the O.S.S. He joined the C.I.A. in 1950. Except for a brief interval as deputy and then chief United States adviser to the pacification program in South Vietnam, Mr. Colby has been with the agency ever since.

Since March 3, he has been the agency's deputy director of operations, the head of its clandestine services, known otherwise as the "Department of Dirty Tricks." He had been executive-director-controller of the agency since January, 1972, six months after he returned from Saigon, where he had succeeded Robert W. Komer as the director of the United States phase of the South Vietnamese Govern-

ment's pacification program.

Mr. Komer, now with the Rand Corporation here, describes Mr. Colby as "a professional's professional—outstandingly capable."

Mr. Colby's involvement with the pacification program was well-known, particularly after he testified about the controversial Operation Phoenix—an antisubversion program—before a House subcommittee in the summer of 1971. Much less is known about his other assignments.

His official biography shows him on "the staff" of the United States Embassy in Stockholm in 1951, and notes that he "served" in the Embassy in Rome from 1953 to 1958. In 1959, he began his involvement with Vietnam, with the title of First Secretary of the Embassy in Saigon.

He was working for the C.I.A., eventually becoming Saigon station chief, and he returned to the agency's McLean, Va., headquarters in 1962 as chief of the Far East Division, which means, in effect, the man in charge of the agency's operations in Vietnam.

The known facts of Mr. Colby's life outside the agency are few. He was born Jan. 4, 1920, in St. Paul, the son of an Army officer. Much of his childhood was spent at Army posts. He graduated from Princeton in 1940, joined the Army the next year, and served in the parachute field artillery until that 1943 call for volunteers for the O. S. S.

He and his wife, the former Barbara Heinzen, live in a Washington suburb. They are, according to friends, de-

vout Roman Catholics, a faith that sustained them after the recent death of a 19-year-old daughter, one of five children.

His personality, by all accounts, is suitable for a man of his calling—"attractive, low-key, almost deliberately anti-charismatic," Mr. Komer said. "Very soft-spoken, unexuberant, very careful," said another man who had had contact with him in Vietnam.

Opinion Differs

He is a man whose life has been the agency's since leaving college. Mr. Komer sees this as an advantage, since he is known and respected among the professionals; others see it as less benign, tending toward making the agency more of a sovereign state. "The first rule is to protect the organization," said one man who views Mr. Colby's appointment skeptically.

The thin, bespectacled Mr. Colby is, however, perhaps the only C.I.A. official ever to have testified on the record, which he did during a Congressional investigation of the "Operation Phoenix" program. He conceded that there had been "occasional abuses," such as political assassinations and the killing of civilian suspects, but maintained that the program was "an essential part of the war effort."

Mr. Komer said that Mr. Colby was a "deep believer in the other war, trying to help the people." Others describe him as an "absolutely committed hard-line Vietnam veteran," a man to whom the ends of the agency justify any means.