

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 47PEOPLE  
29 MAY 1978

IN HIS OWN

WORDS



No stranger to entanglements, weekend sailor Colby has more than his hands full on his 37-foot sloop Eagle Wing II.

## IT WAS ROUGH SAILING, SAYS WILLIAM COLBY OF HIS YEARS AS C.I.A. SKIPPER

"First it was Vietnam, then Watergate," recalls William Colby, a career agent who served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency between 1973 and 1976. "The CIA was Target No. 3, and Congress would have torn us apart if I hadn't cooperated." During Senate and House committee hearings in 1975, Colby was the man in the hot seat, called on to explain assassination plots, bribery, Mafia dealings, domestic spying—even drug experiments on unsuspecting Americans. No one was better qualified to field such difficult questions than Colby, a Princeton-educated Army brat whose World War II service with the OSS included blowing up railroads and working with resistance fighters in France and Norway. Over a quarter century he was a CIA operative in Scandinavia, Italy and

South Vietnam. Several ex-CIA employees—including Philip Agee, Frank Snapp and John Stockwell—have published unauthorized books critical of agency activities from Angola and Vietnam to Chile and Cuba. Colby, 58, comes to the agency's defense in his new autobiography, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (Simon & Schuster, \$12.95). Now a practicing attorney, he commutes by bus from his home in Bethesda to offices two blocks from the White House. America's former sperspook talked with Christopher P. Andersen of PEOPLE.

**What do you think of former CIA agents who are going public?**

They must be punished. What Agee did in revealing the identities of agents and other information is totally repre-

hensible. He is the CIA's first real defector. Snapp and Stockwell have written books discussing subjects they promised in writing not to discuss without the express approval of the agency. When an IRS agent makes an individual's tax return public, he is liable to criminal prosecution. Why not the same for a former CIA agent who does the same thing? The press guards its own sources, and the CIA should have that right as well.

**What kind of punishment do you think is appropriate?**

A jail term. I don't approve of the government's current approach—suing Snapp for violating his contract with the CIA. There should be laws on the books that treat these as criminal matters. Unfortunately, there aren't now.

Photographs by Mark Godfrey/Magnum

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Before parachuting into France during World War II, jumpmaster Colby (standing) led a training drop over North Carolina.

#### Words CONTINUED

*Did you submit the manuscript of your book to the CIA for approval?*

Yes, and they asked for several deletions. One dealt with the Glomar Explorer Project, another with satellite photography—which is a relatively new and sensitive area—and another with the name of a CIA agent whose cover had been changed when he retired. I don't feel that any of this should be kept secret. But 28 years ago I signed an agreement promising not to publish anything without the director's consent, and I'm going to keep my word—unlike some others.

#### *What makes a good spy?*

As I've said before, a good spy is someone so gray a waiter wouldn't notice him in a restaurant.

#### *What was the toughest part of being a CIA agent for you?*

The double life. Obviously I could never tell my wife or children what was really going on. So a barrier was thrown up between me and my family. You have to have an awfully understanding wife to put up with this, and I do.

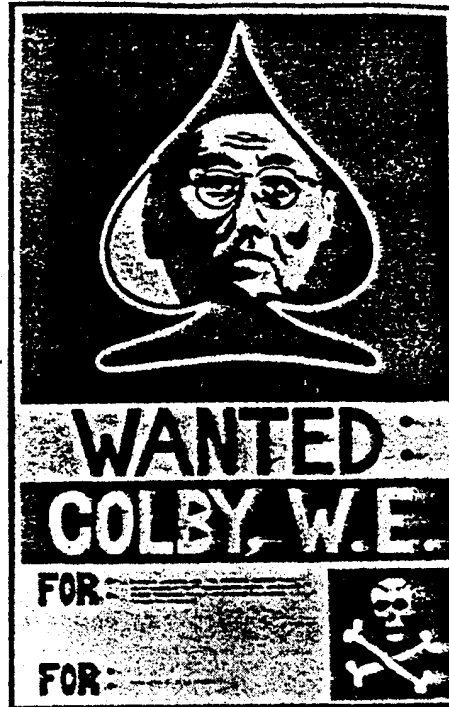
#### *Have you ever killed anyone?*

During World War II, of course. I was shooting at them and they were shooting at me. But no, I have never been called upon to kill someone by the CIA.

#### *What CIA assassination attempts are you aware of?*

During my tenure as director, assassination was *not* an alternative. On one occasion in 1963, however, two high-

Threatening phone calls and this "Wanted" poster put out by radicals accompanied his nomination as director in 1973.



From his law office window, Colby looks out on Washington—and a career in intelligence that spanned more than 25 years.



suggested that we should dispose of Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem's powerful brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. I turned that conversation off immediately. At about the same time, I was to learn years later, we were busy trying to assassinate Castro.



The CIA's man in Vietnam for seven years, Colby inspected a "Rural Development Cadre" before it took up positions in 1968.

#### *Did John Kennedy directly order Castro's assassination?*

In the same way that Henry II's remark "Who will deliver me from this meddlesome priest?" led to Becket's death in Canterbury Cathedral, Kennedy's vague comments about Castro were clearly taken as an order to kill.

#### *Was Kennedy obsessed with Castro?*

Well, Kennedy and his brother Bobby, who was then Attorney General, were obsessed with getting revenge on Castro for the Bay of Pigs. That fiasco was the biggest setback for the CIA's image, but it was the President's fault—not the CIA's—because he chose not to order a second air strike in support of the invasion. Kennedy knew he was to blame and he wanted to get back at Castro.

#### *Could the CIA have been involved in Kennedy's assassination?*

The CIA could not have had a better friend than John Kennedy. He understood the agency and reveled in using it. This country would have been better off had he lived, because he could have utilized the CIA more effectively and not gotten us bogged down in full-scale war in Vietnam. Johnson inherited a mess, but he was too quick to resort to a big military effort.

#### *How did each of the Presidents you worked for handle the CIA?*

Eisenhower had a military staff system; by the time anything reached his desk the decision had already been made. Kennedy would get about 30 people in a room and listen to each throw out ideas and opinions. Johnson

pared that group down to about 11, but he only really understood military force. Nixon was a very serious student. He would read the papers I gave him very carefully and then would make the decisions by himself—alone. At National Security Council meetings Ford was always much more open to different points of view. But he was no dummy.

*Did you agree with the Nixon administration's attempts to undermine Chilean President Salvador Allende?*

Our first mistake was during the election year of 1970, when we failed to support either of Allende's moderate opponents in the campaign. Instead we just engaged in a spoiler propaganda effort against the Marxist Allende. At the direct order of Richard Nixon we then sought a military coup against Allende. This was called Track II to distinguish it from other CIA activities in Chile, and was known only to Nixon, Henry Kissinger, CIA director Richard Helms and Attorney General John Mitchell.

*What did Track II involve?*

Bribery. But funds made available to bribe the Chilean congress weren't spent because that tactic was unwork-

able. An attempt was made by a group once linked to the CIA to kidnap the commander of Chile's army, Gen. Rene Schneider, but it was bungled and Schneider died trying to resist it.

*What do you think of the current situation in Italy?*

It makes me very sad. The Socialists and the Christian Democrats have collapsed, and in their absence there is chaos. The situation won't improve until Italy produces a strong center-left leadership. Most people think the CIA backs right-wing groups, but we always preferred moderates—sometimes even moderate leftists.

*Why did you write about your daughter Catherine's death in the book?*

Vicious rumors had been circulating that she committed suicide because of my involvement in Vietnam. She had physical and psychiatric problems, but on that subject she was always very supportive of me. When she died in 1973 it was from epilepsy and anorexia nervosa, a form of starvation.

*What was the CIA's lowest point?*

Our involvement with the Mafia,

which I did not know about at the time, in trying to find ways to poison Fidel Castro. There were other things that disturbed me: the opening of citizens' mail, for example, and drug experiments of the sort that led to the suicide of Frank Olsen when he was slipped LSD in 1953. I put a stop to them.

*What do you think of the Justice Department's decision to prosecute ex-FBI Director L. Patrick Gray for illegal break-ins?*

I think it is wrong. If you have a whole ethic that dominates an agency like the FBI or the CIA for 30 years and suddenly you want to change it, then go ahead. But don't go back and beat up people with ex post facto laws. It isn't fair, and I don't want the same thing happening to me.

*Are you bitter about being fired by Gerald Ford in November 1975?*

Not at all. It was a political decision at a critically political time. After all the CIA revelations, I was a distinct liability. Given the circumstances, I might have done the same. □

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Bill and Barbara Colby have time for themselves, now that Jonathan, 31, Carl, 27, and Paul, 22, have left home. Christine, 18, leaves for college in the fall.

