

NEWS AND COMMENT

(Continued from page 508)

tors took testimony from some of these officials that Condor was really too small (\$25 million in 1975) to warrant their personal attention. In this light, the report says, "Currie's activities seem unusual."

For example, in August 1974, Schlesinger had struck the Condor from a proposed fiscal 1976 Pentagon budget request; at the same time, the current year's Condor budget was in jeopardy in Congress. Currie, the report charges, told Rockwell executives in advance of his plan to appeal Schlesinger's cut and gave them advice on how to rescue the situation on Capitol Hill. An internal Rockwell letter states:

It was Dr. Currie's suggestion that we continue to work the Congressional area and to attempt to get information directly to Senator McClellan, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee; this is under way.

Currie confirmed this account to *Science* and added that he has often given contractors advice on their dealings with Congress. The Proxmire report, however, terms this "political advice" and suggests this conduct was improper.

Currie also allegedly overstepped the limits of propriety when he came back from Bimini in September 1975. Says the report: "Currie should have considered removing himself from Defense Systems Acquisition Review Council and all other Condor program deliberations and decisions." But Currie says that he "never considered" removing himself from Condor decisions because, "The trip had nothing to do with Rockwell International or anything to do with business."

Later, in September and October, Currie allegedly followed an "irregular procedure" to "not unduly delay a production decision . . . [and] ensure the ultimate production decision was favorable . . . for Condor," according to the report. Condor, this time, was threatened by the feeling among the four high-level civilians at a 30 September DSARC (Defense Systems Acquisition Review Council) meeting that Condor was not ready for production. Currie was among the DSARC principals who expressed this view. But the report argues that afterward, he nonetheless usurped the role of the DSARC chairman, Bennett, by drafting his own decision memorandum on Condor, circulating it for comments, and calling an executive session of DSARC to get a consensus.

Currie's draft memorandum, and his editing of the others' comments on it,

consistently strove to authorize some form of limited production, establish a lenient test program for Condor, and eliminate more high-level reviews. Ultimately, Currie lost on some of these points, the report says. The final memo, approved by the DSARC (with Sullivan, Condor's harshest critic, dissenting) and then approved by Deputy Secretary of Defense William P. Clements, did not authorize production and mandated yet another program review. But the lenient test requirements, which Currie advocated, were finally included instead of a more rigorous test plan proposed by Bennett.

Currie has maintained that the opposite is true, that the Navy wanted "full production" of Condor and that, after the DSARC, he was the architect of a "production slowdown." And, he denies having followed an "irregular procedure": "We have DSARC's all the time. I often step in and take the lead."

Currie is alleged also to have believed DOD had made a "firm commitment" to production of Condor in December 1975. Then the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) included the small Condor program in a giant, \$6 billion cut of DOD's fiscal 1977 budget request. Normally, all appeals of such OMB actions are to go through the Pentagon comptroller, the report says. But instead, Rockwell internal documents say Currie "unilaterally" undertook to reverse this decision. Rockwell documents claim Currie wrote to his Pentagon superiors protesting the cut, but Currie told investigators he had "no specific recollection" of such a letter. But on 13 October after the Proxmire report went to press, the investigators obtained a letter, dated 26 November, from Currie to Clements and titled "Condor: Time Urgent." It concludes:

Recommendation: Reclama [appeal] the OMB action this week so that Congress will understand our firm commitment to proceed into production using the FY76/77 funds.

Senate investigators note that, at the time, there was no "firm commitment to proceed into production" with Condor; this decision was not made until the following June, at a DSARC review—which Sullivan did not attend because his job had been eliminated and Parker represented Currie.

Proxmire's report, in each of these incidents, cites many Rockwell documents in which company executives repeatedly refer to Currie, Parker, or the Directorate Defense Research and Engineering (DDR & E) as allies whose support can be counted on for the "neutralization" of skeptics within DOD.

The company even gave a slide show showing elaborate strategies for maneuvering the Condor around various obstacles (see chart). Often the actual outcome was close to what Rockwell had anticipated. These documents make it clear, at least to the Proxmire subcommittee, that Rockwell had easy access to internal DOD documents, opinions, and activities. Quite simply, the Proxmire report appears to be outraged by this, since some of the documents referred to were refused to the Senate committee. The report says near the end and printed in italics for emphasis:

The contractor, which had no official standing in these processes, was apparently permitted to witness and participate in these deliberations. This suggests the possibility of "giving preferential treatment" which is specifically prohibited by the departmental standards.

Toward the end, the report broadens its scope to attack recent organizational changes which it alleges have weakened independent review and have made the alliance between armed services, contractor, and DDR & E within the Pentagon bureaucracy more powerful. Specifically, the report laments the recent downgrading of Sullivan's program analysis and evaluation office, which is the heir to the systems analysis group of the McNamara era and regarded as one of the sternest internal critics of many pet armed services projects. (In the report, Sullivan comes off as a hero. He testified "I made a practice of not seeing the contractors during that period of time.") Finally, it claims that the DSARC—which is meant to be a vehicle for top-level civilian review, in the case of Condor, "failed."

The stir so far created by the Proxmire attack on Currie does not seem to have aroused enough political alarm to force Rumsfeld to fire his research chief or promise a major overhaul of DOD rules. So it may be left to a new administration to face down the crucial question which the Currie controversy has raised, namely, how close high officials should be, or appear to be, to defense contractors.

—DEBORAH SHAPLEY

RECENT DEATHS

Richard Archbold, 69; president, Archbold Expeditions, American Museum of Natural History; 1 August.

Herman H. Long, 64; president, Talladega College; 8 August.

Owen H. Roth, 61; professor of biology, Saint Vincent College; 26 August.