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## Summary Of Events, Iran-contra Affair Investigation, Aug. 25-sept. 1

by Deborah Tyroler

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Aug. 25: In testimony released to the media, Alan D. Fiers, chief of the CIA's Central America task force, told Congress he knew about the secret air resupply operation by former White House aide Oliver North that aided the Nicaraguan contras in 1986, but he acknowledged that he sat silently last October while superiors gave "cute" answers to Congress that hid the US government role. In a closed session Aug. 5 of the House-Senate Iran- contra committees, Fiers was asked about his actions last Oct. 14 during a House Permanent Select Intelligence Committee meeting where members questioned Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams and Claire George, CIA deputy director for operations, about the shutdown the previous week of a C123K cargo plane over Nicaragua that was piloted by Americans. Abrams denied there was any US government involvement in the flight and George said the CIA was not involved directly or indirectly in the operation. Fiers testified that he was "taken aback" by Abrams' sweeping denial of US involvement since Fiers knew that North was directing the privately run operation. Fiers also knew that one of his subordinates, the CIA station chief in Costa Rica, was aiding the enterprise. Reflecting a concern about the forthrightness of CIA witnesses that was also voiced by other committee members, Sen. William Cohen (R-Maine) lectured Fiers that "when you are called to testify, I think your obligation runs to something broader and higher than just the agency." Fiers testified that he believed he had been caught in a "nutcracker" situation when he took the job of running the CIA's Nicaraguan operation in October 1984, days after Congress passed the Boland amendment prohibiting US aid to the contras fighting the government of Nicaragua. In the testimony and exhibits released Aug. 25, Fiers testified there was "considerable evidence...that people in and around (former contra leader) Eden Pastora were in fact involved in cocaine-running to the United States to raise revenue for their cause." Because of the allegations, Fiers said "it was right not to deal with" Pastora, who attempted for a time to open a southern front from Costa Rica against the Sandinista government. Discussing what he called "the remnants of Pastora's people," Fiers said, "We developed information that they were receiving money from cocaine trafficking." [The committees disclosed they had been unable to corroborate allegations of "US government-condoned drug trafficking by contra leaders and contra organizations or that contra leaders or organizations did in fact take part in such activity," according to a July 23 letter to Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the House panel, that was released with the Aug. 25 exhibits. The House investigators interviewed hundreds of individuals, reviewed contra financial records and the files of eight government agencies and discovered "almost all of these allegations originate from persons indicted or convicted of drug smuggling."] In October 1986, after Congress approved \$100 million for contra aid, Fiers said that CIA Director William Casey approved an attempt to solicit additional funds for the contras from Taiwan, which had already given \$2 million. Apparently, the CIA believed they needed another \$8 million to \$10 million. Fiers, who worked closely with Marine Lt. Col. North for several years, said the former National Security Council staff aide had a penchant for stretching the truth. "I never knew Col. North to be an absolute liar," Fiers said, "but I never took anything he said at face value because I knew that he was bombastic and embellished the record, and threw curves, speed balls and spitballs to get

what he wanted, and I knew it and I knew it well." Pressed by Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) to explain North's performance before the committees, Fiers went on to say, "I have seen Col. North play fast and loose with the facts. And I think the record will substantiate that. But, on the other hand, I believe that from where I sit, from the glimpses I saw of this thing (North's televised testimony) as the train windows went by, there was a lot of fact in what he said, too." Fiers also shed some light on one of the unanswered questions of the investigation: How the contras were financed after July 1986, when government-supplied humanitarian aid had ended and almost no funds were provided from contributions or the proceeds from US arms sales to Iran. They borrowed. The contras, Fiers said, "started to accumulate a debt...It was very clear that they were not, I repeat not, getting any money." From July forward, he said, "there were no deliveries of any type, either arms or food...that went to the resistance forces." Fiers testified that he took over the Central American post at the time the CIA inspector general was investigating the agency's distribution of a manual to the contras on guerrilla warfare that advocated "selective use of violence" to neutralize Sandinista political targets. "I saw the devastating impact of five letters of reprimand (received by those involved in the manual's distribution)," Fiers said and determined that he would run the task force "so that all the liability, the political heat, falls on me." During his testimony, however, Fiers repeatedly was presented with cables, notes and memos describing activities with the contras that he said he failed to recall or were in error. He could not recollect an August 1985 cable discussing a controversial airfield being built in Costa Rica for the North resupply network, although he drafted a reply to it. "I don't recall having read the thing, but obviously I did read it," he said. Although Fiers testified that he learned of the participants in North's operations throughout 1986, Fiers failed to name any of them last Dec. 9, when he appeared before the Senate intelligence committee. When Sen. David Boren (D-Okla.) asked him why he did not, Fiers responded: "I can't figure why." Later he added: "I was walking a line once again as a member of a team...It was a very tense sort of moment in time. I was one of the first ones off the block. I was exposed. I was nervous. And I was not going to perjure myself." Reflecting on the Oct. 14 hearing, when Abrams denied any US government involvement with the contra resupply plane that was shot down, Fiers said, "I was taken aback by the statement...Mr. George was taken aback by his statement." "I didn't know what the status of Mr. Abrams' knowledgeability was...I didn't ask him how he got there. I didn't get involved with it. I didn't understand. I didn't ask him about it. I just let it sit there," he said. As for George, Fiers said, he "had the broad strokes, he knew that Ollie (North) had been around and was involved, (but) he didn't know as much detail of the involvement as I did." Asked about his Oct. 14 testimony, Fiers replied: "It's all part of a passivity that I described to the committee just to get through troubled waters and get on to the next program." Fiers also told the committees that: By the spring of 1986, he had a "pretty clear understanding" of what North was doing to support the contras. He noted that North passed out photographs of a secret airstrip in Costa Rica to a "whole gaggle" of senior administration officials. "I told Ollie, 'You ought to keep your mouth shut, you ought not to talk so much.'" The CIA found out about the contra aid network directed by North and even had reports on some of the arms purchases as they happened. One CIA cable from March 1985, released by the committees, noted that retired major general Richard Secord was buying arms through a Canadian broker who quoted him as saying American authorities would not stop the shipment because "he was one of them." In early 1986, when Congress relaxed its restrictions on aiding the contras, Fiers acknowledged allowing his field operatives too much leeway in aiding the contras. "I got a little too rambunctious," he said, "like a colt that got out of the barn to play, and I pulled myself in. I didn't do it all myself. My task force lawyer was whispering like Jiminy Cricket in my ear. I probably got us a little too far forward-leaning at one point in time and then pulled us back." Aug. 27: Documents

and testimony released this week show that the CIA's advice was often overlooked in the Iran affair. Among the disclosures were the testimony by Alan Fiers, the chief of the agency's Central America task force, that the CIA had failed to provide a complete set of its intelligence reporting on Central America to the House Select Committee on Intelligence. Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, disclosed that in 1985, the agency withheld three reports on the contras. He said the agency had agreed to provide its raw reports to a House committee staff member, Richard Giza. Stokes said one of the reports disclosed the involvement of retired major general Richard Secord in buying arms for the contras in March 1985; another said the air resupply operations began in Nov 1985, and the third mentioned arms shipments by South Africa to the contras. In a deposition, Lieut. Col. Robert A. Earl, a North deputy, said that North returned to his office last Nov. 21, saying he had attended a high-level White House meeting and that he had been "designated the scapegoat" for the Iran-contra affair. North did not say who had told him he would be cast in this role. Earl also made these points: North at one point considered the idea of giving the contras money that had been solicited for hostage operations from H. Ross Perot, the Texas billionaire. The administration was moving forward with a plan for "damage control" that had three phases. Initially, the plan was to flatly deny dealing with Iran. When that failed, the administration was prepared to brief Congress on the broad outlines. When that too proved insufficient, "phase three" was begun with the destruction of documents and North's role as a scapegoat. Sept. 1: Independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh is expected to seek an interview with President Reagan about the Iran-contra affair, probably this fall, before pressing ahead with criminal charges against some of his former aides, according to informed sources. Walsh will not talk about the progress of his inquiry, but sources familiar with the investigation say he still must collect a considerable amount of evidence before obtaining a broad conspiracy indictment against Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the fired National Security Council aide; Rear Adm. John M. Poindexter, former national security adviser, and others. Indictments are now expected in late October or November at the earliest. In addition to the work still to be done by his office, the sources said Walsh and his prosecutors have decided to wait until after the Senate-House Iran-contra committees make their final report. Committee officials say they hope to do this by early October, but they say it is "a massive job" and could take a bit longer. (Basic data from several reports by WASHINGTON POST, NEW YORK TIMES)

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