

George's Prints Found on Portion of Iran-

By George Lardner Jr.
and Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writers

An FBI expert said yesterday he found two of Clair E. George's fingerprints just beneath the crossed-out portion of a 1986 draft statement to Congress that George is accused of censoring to protect the Reagan White House.

Testifying at the former CIA spy chief's trial in federal court here, FBI fingerprint expert Edgar S. Corley said he found prints from both of George's ring fingers on the document when he examined it just a few weeks ago.

The document, with George's thumbprint on another page, was recovered from George's safe at CIA headquarters. Prosecutors contend it is a key piece of evidence substantiating charges that George obstructed congressional investigations of the Iran-contra scandal and then lied about the statement under questioning by a federal grand jury last year.

According to the indictment, George ordered a top deputy, Alan D. Fiers, not to disclose certain facts to two congressional

committees. The facts involved the Reagan administration's secret military resupply operation for the contra rebels in Nicaragua. George is alleged to have feared disclosure would "turn the spotlight" on the administration and reveal then-White House aide Oliver L. North's central role in the network.

Fiers has testified that he wanted to tell Congress about how a congressionally authorized humanitarian aid operation for the rebels evolved into a military resupply line controlled by "private benefactors." But he said George told him to say nothing about the operation and delete mention of it from a draft statement to Congress that Fiers had prepared for George.

The draft from George's safe contained X's through a sentence about Ilopango air base in El Salvador, a headquarters for the aid operation. Just beneath that crossed-out segment, Corley testified, were two of George's fingerprints.

Under questioning yesterday morning by George's chief defense lawyer, Richard A. Hibey, Corley said he did not know when the prints might have been left on the document.

The afternoon session provided an illustration of how difficult it is for the prosecu-

tors to draw testimony from CIA officials that might put their former colleague's case in a bad light.

Thomas Twetten, who now holds George's former job as chief of covert operations and worked for George over most of his 30-year CIA career, repeatedly testified he could not recall critical events that would have linked his former boss to charges in the indictment.

Several times, when Twetten said he could not remember specific events or meetings, prosecutor Michael Vhay read back to Twetten answers the CIA official gave during earlier appearances before federal grand juries in 1988 and 1991.

For example, he was shown a document he discussed with George on Jan. 25, 1986, that detailed the role to be played by someone named "Copp" in upcoming secret sales of arms to Iran. The sales were intended to gain the freedom of U.S. hostages held in Lebanon by pro-Iranian groups.

Twetten said he already knew that Copp was the alias for retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, but yesterday he could not recall whether George knew that too. George has been accused of lying to several

Contra Paper, FBI Expert Says

congressional committees in late 1986 about his knowledge of Secord.

Vhay reminded Twetten that in 1991 grand jury testimony, Twetten had been asked the same question and had responded that George did know Copp was Secord.

Twetten also told the grand jury last year that it was "my belief that [George] understood who the players" named in the memo were. Yesterday, Twetten said his answers a year ago were "truthful" and "I stand by them today."

On several other occasions yesterday, Twetten said he would accept whatever he said in the past. But he added that being reminded of his previous testimony did not help refresh his recollection.

Twetten did disclose one new piece in the Iran-contra jigsaw puzzle that also appeared to support the prosecution's case.

He said that George and others at the agency had concerns about Secord and an associate, Albert Hakim, because of allegations that both men at some time might have been involved in shady arms dealings.

In early 1986, Twetten said North told him during a trip to Germany that one reason he wanted to keep Secord and Hakim in-

involved in the Iranian arms deals was because "they were important in his undertaking or activity in Central America."

That, Twetten testified, was the first he knew of their contra activities. When he returned to CIA headquarters, Twetten relayed that information to his immediate boss and then directly to George.

Twetten said he was worried about the involvement of Secord and Hakim, not only because of their reputations, but also because CIA policy advised against using the same individuals in more than one covert action.

Another high-ranking CIA official, Charles Allen, who coordinated the Iranian arms deals with North, said George had the only CIA copy of North's initial and "highly ambitious" arms-for-hostages plan.

On cross-examination, however, Allen acknowledged that he had made some misstatements to a House committee investigating the Iran-contra affair in December 1986, but was not prosecuted for doing so. Allen said the misstatements were unintentional and he had corrected them when shown a document that proved them to be false.