

ACLU Files Suit Against Army Intelligence Unit

By Peter Osmos

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The Army's nationwide 1,000-man intelligence network, which among other duties collects information on civilians involved in "civil disturbances," was challenged in a suit filed yesterday in U.S. District Court.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed the suit on behalf of a dozen politically active individuals and groups, charging that the Army's surveillance violates their First Amendment rights.

An Army spokesman acknowledged that data is collected on persons "active in past civil disturbances." The information, he said, is maintained on an identification list, sometimes including photographs.

The suit asks for a court order forbidding the Army from "collection, maintenance, storage and distribution of information about the lawful political activities" of dissenters.

Among the constitutional rights being violated by the data collection, the suit alleges, "the rights of free speech and association, and . . . the right of privacy."

Listed as defendants in the suit are Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, Army Secretary Stanley Resor, Gen. William Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff, and Gen. Hiram Blakenfeld, U.S. Army Intelligence Command.

Army officials declined comment directly on the suit yesterday. They did say, however, that the intelligence command, headquartered at Ft. Belvoir, has 100 agents located in about 300 cities.

A spokesman said these officers conduct investigations "security clearance purposes" and collect information concerning the potential for civil disorders in order to permit (the Army) to discharge its responsibilities under the Constitution . . .

The spokesman said the Army is directed to provide information in the event a civil disturbance "exceeds the control capability of" state and local authorities. Much of the information is kept in a computerized data bank, he said. This program was begun in 1965.

Among those bringing the suit are the Vietnam Moratorium Committee, Women's Strike for Peace, Veterans for Peace in Vietnam, the War Resister's League and the Rev. Albert B. Cleage, a black minister from Detroit.

The suit was prompted by an article in the January issue of "The Washington Monthly" about activities of the intelligence command.