

THE STATES-

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New Orleans

Top postal office
CIA monitored

ITEM

Final

, La.

10 Cents

ials knew

N.O. mail

International mail going through New Orleans and New York was monitored by the CIA with the knowledge of at least two postmasters general, according to testimony released today by a House subcommittee.

Monitoring continued as late as 1973, although it is not known whether the practice was still continuing in New Orleans at that date, according to the testimony.

Chief U.S. Postal Inspector William J. Cotter said in testimony released today that he was ordered in 1969 to allow the Central Intelligence Agency to continue monitoring private mail to and from the Soviet Union even though he tried to halt the practice.

Cotter said he did succeed in getting the practice halted four years later.

In New Orleans, Postmaster Paul V. Burke said that to his knowledge "there's never been anything like that since I became postmaster in February, 1968.

"Certainly I've never heard anything officially or unofficially in regards to

this," Burke added.

But another postal official here said the CIA could have gone through the U.S. Postal Service's inspection agency in New Orleans. The inspection agency operates independently from the post office administration here, said director of delivery and retail sales Gerald Pranger.

Pranger said that although it was "possible" the CIA monitored mail here, he was not aware of it.

Cotter told the House civil rights subcommittee in a secret session last Tuesday that former Postmaster General Winton Blount, after meeting with then-CIA Director Richard Helms, ordered him to allow the CIA inspections to continue in 1969.

But Cotter said he finally told the CIA to "get superior approval for this thing or discontinue it" by Feb. 15, 1973.

"They suspended it, and that's the end of the project," Cotter said. "And that's the story."

Cotter said he understood that when he first objected then-Atty. Gen. John N.

Mitchell also "was briefed and thought — I understand — the project was fine."

Cotter also said he thought the White House knew of the CIA mail surveillance over the years, but that he did not know for sure.

The CIA has said it inspected mail to and from some Communist nations for 20 years, starting in 1953, and Cotter testified that former Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield and J. Edward Day were told about it.

However, Cotter indicated that he did not think that Summerfield and Day knew that some of the letters would actually be opened.

CIA agents went through sacks of U.S. mail to and from the Soviet Union at what is now John F. Kennedy International Airport and opened and copied some of the letters, Cotter said.

The CIA also monitored mail to and from mainland China at San Francisco but were not authorized to open any letters, Cotter said.

He said it is possible foreign mail was

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CIA opened mail here

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monitored by the CIA in other cities as well but that he does not know for certain.

Cotter, a former CIA agent, told the subcommittee that he learned about 1955 that letters were being opened by the CIA at the New York airport and that he began trying to halt the operation when he became chief U. S. postal inspector in 1969.

Cotter said he told Helms he wanted the mail surveillance either approved by high authority or halted.

Three days later, he said, Blount called him and said, "I had a meeting with your former boss and carry on with the project."

Cotter said he finally told the CIA in 1973 to "get superior approval for this thing or discontinue it."

"They suspended it, and that's the end of the project," Cotter said.

CIA Director William E. Colby, in disclosing the operation earlier this year, said it was conducted from 1953 until February 1973.

"I'm amazed, 20 years it goes on, that it didn't hit the fan somehow," Cotter said.

Subcommittee Chairman Robert W. Kastenmeier, D-Wis., announced Thursday that he planned to release Cotter's testimony today if the Justice Department supplied no substantive objection.

The Justice Department asked for the secrecy, but subcommittee members voted to release the testimony unless the department could provide a substantial reason why it should not be made public.

Rep. Bella S. Abzug, D-N.Y., disclosed two weeks ago that the CIA had admitted opening at least two letters she mail-

ed to Russia in 1958 and 1962 in connection with estate cases she handled as a lawyer.

Summerfield was postmaster general from 1952 to 1961. Day was postmaster general from 1961 to 1963.

When the CIA sent Rep. Abzug its file on her, including photocopies of the two letters, the agency told her that it surveilled U.S. mail to and from certain Communist countries from 1953 to February 1973.

CIA Legislative Counsel George L. Cary told her the mail was gleaned for intelligence, Communist censorship techniques and addresses to provide leads for foreign intelligence operations and agent recruitment.

Rep. Abzug said the current postmaster general, Benjamin F. Bailar, visited her to express "his extreme concern and outrage at this illegal interference with the U.S. mails."

A former CIA employe, Melvin Crain, now a political science professor at San Diego State University, submitted a prepared opening statement saying CIA officials told him when he was an employe that the mail surveillance was illegal.

Crain also said that Helms knew about the mail surveillance and that copies of letters were sent to the FBI which also knew it was illegal.

Crain said in the statement he took copies of the letters to former Secretary of State Dean Acheson in an effort to have the surveillance stopped but that Acheson expressed little concern.

Crain's statement said the mail was intercepted in New York and New Orleans and letters were opened, copied, resealed and sent on. Crain said he had a copy of one letter to turn over to the committee.