

CIA reportedly rejected mail-spying halt

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Chief U.S. Postal Inspector William Cotter says he tried in 1971 to stop Central Intelligence Agency surveillance and opening of mail, but was blocked by then-CIA Director Richard Helms and then-Postmaster General Winton Blount.

In testimony released Friday, Cotter said that as a former CIA agent he knew about CIA monitoring of private mail to and from the Soviet Union.

Cotter said that after he became chief postal inspector he went to Helms to get it stopped. He said Helms told him "All right, I'll take care of it." Three days later, Cotter testified, he was called in by Blount, who said:

"I had a meeting with your former boss, and carry on with the project."

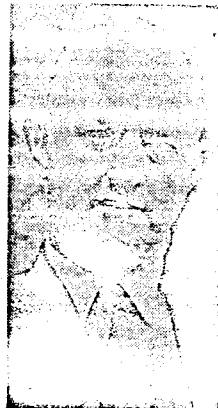
Cotter testified he understood that then-Attorney General John Mitchell was briefed and thought "the project was fine." Cotter said he did not know if former President Nixon or other presidents knew about



Richard Helms

the mail operation, but said, "I personally feel presidents were aware of this."

Cotter said he succeeded in halting the 20-year CIA mail operation in February 1973. He said Postmaster Gen. Benjamin Bailar wrote to CIA director William Colby this month, saying: "I want your personal assurance that there are no more of these types of operations presently



Winton Blount

going on, planned or ever to be undertaken."

Cotter acknowledged that he could not be certain no CIA mail surveillance was going on because he had not seen a reply to Bailar's letter, but he said, "I doubt it."

Cotter said his efforts to halt the surveillance succeeded when "I finally gave

them a deadline of Feb. 15, 1973, either get superior approval for this thing or discontinue it."

He said the CIA asked for an extension, but "I said suspend the project; they suspended it and that's the end of the project."

Cotter, a lawyer, said he considers the CIA mail opening illegal, but U.S. Postal Service lawyers have not ruled it to be. He said the CIA considered it a proper foreign intelligence operation.

Cotter gave the testimony at a closed session of the House civil rights subcommittee last Tuesday. The subcommittee voted to release it Friday morning.

He said Arthur Summerfield and J. Edward Day, postmasters general in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, knew about the CIA operation. However, he said he doubted they knew agents opened and copied some letters.

For 20 years CIA agents sorted private mail to the Soviet Union going through what is now New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, Cotter said. He said some mail to and from Cuba and Eastern Europe also was monitored.

"Obviously they did surreptitiously slip some of these letters in their pockets, or something like that, removed it from the premises, opened it, took pictures of it," Cotter testified.

A smaller CIA operation in San Francisco monitored mail from mainland China for intelligence, including "the point of development of atomic energy in China," he said.

A former CIA employee testified before the House subcommittee Friday that he saw a woman in charge of sorted letters daily from the Soviet mail operation in New York City in 1958 and 1959.

To oversee intelligence probes

Ford hires housing chief's husband

United Press International

WASHINGTON — President Ford is bringing the husband of his housing secretary into the White House to help oversee handling of housing investigations into U.S. intelligence agencies, White House officials said Friday.

Roderick Hills, millionaire husband of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Carla Anderson Hills, already is on the payroll as a \$138-a-day consultant pending security checks on his appointment as a presidential counsel and deputy to Ford's chief adviser, Philip W. Buchen, aides said.

Buchen, Hills and an assistant still to be named will handle all legal aspects of

the investigations. Subjects for congressional inquiries include charges that the Central Intelligence Agency engaged in domestic espionage, planned foreign political assassinations and spent \$350 million to raise partially a sunken Soviet submarine.

Administration sources said Ford discarded an idea to create a "czar" or "super-spook" to oversee all federal intelligence activities. Such action would have cost CIA director William Colby his leadership in the federal cloak-and-dagger world.

Instead, Ford chose to use the regular White House organization. Under this policy, all congressional requests for documents and other

information will be handled normally. The CIA will supply routine information requested by the lawmakers, and the Buchen-Hills team will sift out data that could be legally sensitive.

Some information may pass through the President's National Security Council, directed by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Associate Deputy Attorney General James Wilderouter is likely to be named chief assistant to Hills in the expansion of the White House counsel's office, administration sources said.

Mrs. Hills, 41, was confirmed by the Senate last week for her cabinet post. She is the third woman to serve in the Cabinet.