

CIA Kept Soviet Mail From U.S.

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More than 100 pieces of mail sent in 1972 from the Soviet Union to addressees in the United States were intercepted and retained by the Central Intelligence Agency until this week, the CIA has told the Postal Service.

CIA Director William E. Colby said in a letter to Postmaster General Benjamin F. Ballar that the mail—85 postcards and 25 letters—had just been located in an undisclosed location used by the CIA.

Colby suggested that Ballar forward the mail to its intended recipients with the CIA's apology for the delay.

While the CIA has previously admitted opening and copying first-class mail without a required search warrant, yesterday's disclosure by Ballar was the first indication that the CIA had kept mail from its intended recipients.

In a statement, Ballar said he notified the Justice Department that the mail had been detained, and it served Ballar with a search warrant for the mail.

Ballar said the Justice Department is holding the mail "pending possible legal action against those responsible for opening and detaining it."

The Rockefeller commission reported last month that the CIA had opened mail between the United States and certain Communist countries—particularly the Soviet Union—for 20 years ending in 1973.

In its last year of operation, the intercept program in New York examined the outsides of 2.3 million pieces of mail to and from the Soviet Union, and opened and analyzed the contents of 8,700 pieces, the report said.

The program was stopped by William J. Cotter, the chief postal inspector, who knew

of the interceptions because he had been a CIA agent.

Explaining the discovery of the 110 opened pieces of mail, Colby told Ballar in a letter that the mail had been found "on a shelf in a securely vaulted area" in office space assigned to a unit of the CIA.

Colby said the mail was with a dispatch from a CIA installation in Latin America. Detailing the mail's tortuous path, Colby said it had been given to the CIA's Latin American installation.

That citizen had received it from another resident of the

See MAIL, A17, Col. 7

CIA Retained 110 Pieces of Soviet Mail

MAIL, From A1

area who had gotten it "in a single package which appeared . . . to have been mailed to him by a New York firm."

Although Colby said the firm was not connected with mail interceptions, he did not reveal the identity of the company nor of others involved in retrieving the mail.

In his reply to Colby, Ballar said, "The events you describe in your letter stand in clear violation of the sanctity of the mails and threaten to shake public confidence in the integrity of the mail."

Ballar asked that the CIA turn over any other mail it might have detained.